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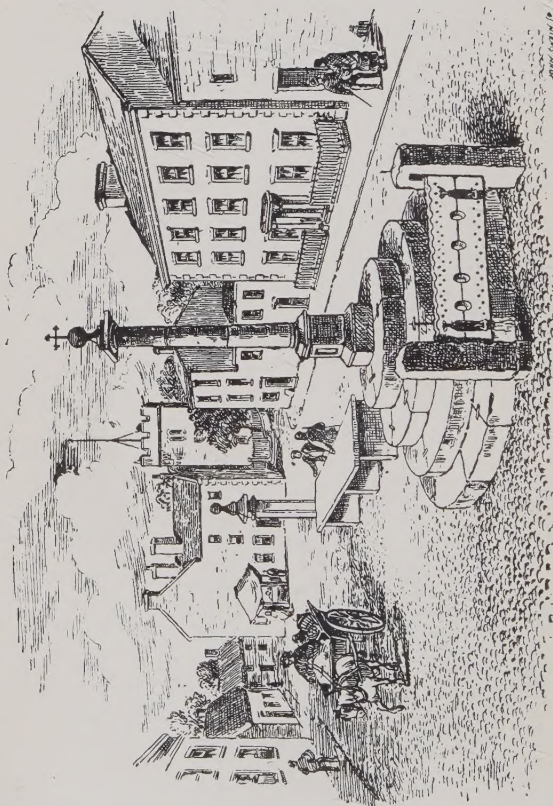
THE APOSTLES OF FYLDE METHODISM



JOHN TAYLOR



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THE APOSTLES

OF

FYLDE METHODISM.

BY

JOHN TAYLOR, *insurance agent*

AUTHOR OF

"REMINISCENCES OF ISAAC MARSDEN," "PICTURE TRUTHS,"

"GREAT LESSONS FROM LITTLE THINGS," ETC.

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PREFACE.

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WHILE preparing a lecture for our young people on the "Introduction of Methodism to Blackpool," I was astonished to find how little the Fylde people knew of their own history. Lives of self-denial, and deeds of heroism, had laid the foundations of the Church as it is to-day, and the noble men and women who had toiled, and suffered, and died for the truth, were in danger of being forgotten.

What is true of the Fylde country is true of every Circuit and Church in the land. The Gospel lifts men and women from obscurity and weakness, and makes them powerful for good. It transforms some of them into the grandest heroes the world has ever seen; and if half the time and talent spent in writing works of fiction were devoted to the facts of Church history, it would soon be acknowledged that "fact is stranger than fiction."

This book is not a history of Fylde Methodism. It is a series of biographical sketches of the men and women who made the Church what it is, and who were themselves transformed and sanctified by the Gospel they believed and taught. I have gathered my facts from official documents and Circuit records, and from the lips of old people who knew the parties I have named. So far as I could, I have verified every statement I have made, and the reader may rely on its absolute truthfulness.

And so long as the bright succession of holy men and women runs, the "Acts of the Apostles" will have to be written. We need to realise that the power of the Gospel is the same in every age and place, and that wherever it is faithfully preached and consistently lived, it must and will bring forth fruit.

If the reading of this book strengthens any man's faith in God, or intensifies his love and devotion to the cause, it will have served its purpose nobly.

JOHN TAYLOR.

29, BANK STREET, BLACKPOOL.



THE APOSTLES OF FYLDE METHODISM.



I.

THE FYLDE COUNTRY.



HE "Fylde," or "Garden," is the name given to that tract of country which lies between the rivers Ribble and Wyre, in North-West Lancashire. The name is sometimes applied to the district beyond the Wyre as far as the mouth of the Lune.

It is a level, fertile country, about twenty-four miles long by eighteen broad, extending from Lytham and Freckleton on the south to Scorton and Pilling on the north, and from Preston on the east to Blackpool and Fleetwood on the west.

In the summer season excursion steamers sail from Preston occasionally on a coasting trip, and this is a very enjoyable method of surveying the Fylde country. We leave "Proud Preston" for a sail down the Ribble early in the morning, as the tide serves us only at that hour. The tall smoky chimneys cause a dark cloud to hang over the town, but the sky is clear and the prospect bright as we leave the town behind. For a few miles we sail along the edge of Preston Marsh, that was once a bog and morass, but is now drained and rendered fertile. Soon we approach a bluff, overlooking the

river, on which stands Freckleton, the most southerly village in the Fylde. Through an intricate channel and over shifting sands we plough our way to Lytham, twelve miles from Preston.

Lytham is a clean, quiet, respectable town, of about 5000 inhabitants, that for years has been under a paternal government. The Clifton family, of Lytham Hall, being land-owners of the entire parish, and spending most of their time in the town, have preserved a form of local government closely approaching to the feudal system of the olden time. The town has thus acquired a reputation for order and quietness and respectability, and this reputation has attracted to the place visitors and residents who desire to escape from the bustle and strife of our large towns. It has an extensive promenade and pier, and during the summer steamers run daily to Southport, which is only eight miles distant across the sands.

Resuming our journey from Lytham, we sail through a narrow, intricate channel, near the lighthouse at the mouth of the Ribble, and steering northward, we are soon at St. Annes, about two and a half miles from Lytham.

St. Annes is the youngest of the Fylde towns. It was only born about ten or a dozen years ago. A number of enterprising capitalists leased the land from J. T. Clifton, Esq., of Lytham Hall, and transformed a lonely rabbit warren into a town. It has now all the attractions of a watering-place, and is largely patronised by visitors seeking repose and quietness. It affords a fine view of Southport, and the distant hills of North Wales, from its promenade and pier.

Steaming again north-west through the channel known on the charts as "North Hollow," we soon come abreast of South Shore and Blackpool, and land at one of the piers. We find ourselves on a magnificent promenade nearly three miles long, and in a town that out of season has a population of about 15,000, while during the season it is crowded with visitors from every part of the country. The charm of the place is its magnificent sweep of sea. Like St. Annes, it is

a modern town. It has no history. It takes its name from a "black pool" of stagnant, bog-stained water that used to lodge among its primitive sand-hills.

We spend a day or two in Blackpool for rest and recreation, till one day we find another steamer sailing for Glasson Dock, and we join her. For eight or ten miles we are hugging the coast, past Bispham and Cleveleys, till in half an hour we are abreast Rossall College, a large public school, where many of the doctors and lawyers of the next generation are polishing their wits and keeping themselves in training for the great conflict of life.

Soon we pass Rossall Point, a huge landmark built of immense beams of timber, and now we may consider ourselves on the shores of Morecambe Bay. Away to the right is Fleetwood, on the banks of the Wyre. You can see its immense grain-elevator and the shipping in its dock. The town is largely interested in the shipping trade, and it has a fine fleet of fishing-boats. Like St. Annes and Blackpool, it is a modern town. Compared with Lancaster, York, and Chester, these large Fylde towns are mushroom growths of yesterday.

They all owe their development to the line of railway opened in 1846 from Preston to Fleetwood, and known to this day as the Preston and Wyre Railway.

Passing Fleetwood Lighthouse, we steer away to the right, through Lune Deep, skirting the coast of Pilling and Cockerham, and catching distant glimpses of Lancaster, Morecambe, Grange, Ulverston, and Barrow. Soon we arrive at Glasson, the oldest dock in the kingdom. It is five miles from Lancaster, and depends for its support mainly on the timber trade. It has immense timber ponds and dock accommodation; but there is a quiet, sleepy, old-world air about it that must be experienced to be understood.

A smart walk of five or six miles across well-cultivated fields will bring us to Scorton, whence we take train on the London and North-Western Railway to Preston again.

So that in imagination, we have travelled round the Fylde

as it is to-day. It is bounded on the east by a range of hills stretching from Lancaster to Preston, and known by various names, such as Scorton Fells and Wyresdale, but they are all parts of the great central mountain chain of Lancashire. From these hills the district stretches away in level or undulating plains to the shores of Morecambe Bay and the Irish Sea on the west.

It now requires an effort of the imagination to realise the Fylde country as it was a century ago.

By one stroke of the pen we must obliterate all the watering-places on the coast, and sweep away their thoughtless, giddy multitudes. By another stroke of the pen we must wipe out all the lines of railway, and all the steam-engines and steamboats and telegraphs, and modern discoveries and inventions. We must put back the clock of time for a hundred years, and undo all the good that has been done by the spread of knowledge and the progress of truth during that period.

If our great-grandfathers had been anxious to visit and explore the Fylde at that period, they would have found it a very formidable task indeed. They would have found Preston the key of the Fylde then as now.

Preston at that time was a place of strong passions, and lasting antipathies, and bitter controversies. She was known throughout the land for her passionate love and violent hatred. If she loved a cause, it was a love that could brook no rival and could bear no contradiction. If she hated a cause, it was a hatred so intense that only blood could pacify it. The Preston men of those days never did things by halves. If they had a contested election, they spent a fortune over it in bribery and corruption, and they were not content to outvote their opponents and leave them in a numerical minority; they generally contrived to beat and mutilate and kill some of them before the strife was over. Civil war often raged in the town between the Catholics and Orangemen with such fury that the Riot Act had to be read and the military cleared the streets at the point of the sword. It was only by the strong arm of civil authority that men's passions

were curbed and their violence restrained in those good old times.

And what was true of Preston men was true to a less degree of the men and women in the villages and hamlets of the Fylde. They imbibed their religious and political opinions with their mothers' milk, and from the cradle to the grave they were of the same opinion still. In religious matters they were intensely conservative and averse to change. Many of them were the descendants of ancient Roman Catholic families, who cherished the old faith, and were true to their principles all through the stormy times of the Reformation; and when kingdoms were overthrown and dynasties perished before the advancing waves of Protestantism, they were unwavering in their allegiance to the Church of Rome. The sons inherited their religious opinions, as they inherited their broad acres, from their sires, and outside influences had no effect upon them.

Others, again, were staunch English Protestants, belonging to the yeomanry, farming, and trading classes, who had been brought up under the influence of the Established Church. These were numerous, comparatively wealthy, and very decided in their religious and political opinions. Many of them were Orangemen, who bore no love to their Catholic neighbours, and who at election times raised the cry of "Church and King," and invariably voted "true blue."

A third section of the community represented the Independents and Baptists. These men were the sturdy sons of those sires from whom Cromwell recruited his Ironsides. They were Puritans and Nonconformists, who prided themselves on their church history, and who were prepared to fight and die for liberty of conscience. They studded the Fylde with little white-washed conventicles, in which they sang and prayed and heard sermons after their own tastes, from men who cared for neither priest nor bishop nor pope. They were high Calvinists, as bigoted and exclusive in their teachings as any of the other denominations. At election times they were generally in a minority; but they were a

body of men who had to be reckoned with in every great movement. They were powerful and demonstrative and uncompromising, as their fathers had been in the times of the great civil war.

These three denominations held sway throughout the Fylde. They had no love for each other, but they all agreed in their aversion to change and in their demonstrative attachment to the faith of their fathers.

Outside the Christian Churches were hundreds of families who never thought about religion, and had no love for Christianity. They vegetated and existed without mental effort or spiritual life. Intellectually and morally they were only a few degrees above their own sheep and cattle. And like the cattle, when their passions were roused, they were full of blind indiscriminating fury.

It is not difficult to account for the mental peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of the Fylde people at that time, if we consider their position and circumstances.

They were shut up to a little world of their own. Seed-time and harvest, summer and winter, found them performing the same dull round of duties. They ploughed and dug, and planted and sowed, and reaped, and tended their cattle, month by month and year by year, from childhood and youth to hoary hairs. So they became human machines, and life was one stupendous effort to solve the problem: "What shall we eat? What shall we drink? Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" They seldom saw a strange face or heard a strange voice. An occasional tramp would beg at their door by day and plunder their hen-roost by night. So they came to regard every stranger as a foe, and earned for themselves a reputation for want of hospitality.

They were far removed from the great highways of the world's thought and activity. The roads in the Fylde led nowhere. They were simply country lanes and occupation roads from farm to field, that had been used as highways. They were very narrow and crooked, and disgracefully dirty and uneven. It was safest to ride on horseback in wet

weather, for if your horse sank to his knees in mud, he would generally contrive to pitch you over his head into a soft bed of mud, and scramble out with the empty saddle. If you drove, the chances were you would either lose the wheels or the whole conveyance, or you would stick fast in a bog for an indefinite period. The London and Scotch coaches passed through Preston, and the ostlers and stable-boys heard the latest news from the great world outside. And when the Fylde farmers went to Preston market, they gathered their news second-hand from these voracious ostlers and stable-boys. So that battles might be fought and victories won, and they would hear nothing about them for weeks or months. There were no newspapers except the *London Newsletter*, that was sent to the Vicarage every week, and usually formed the chief item in the parson's sermon on the following Sunday.

They were very superstitious. The bulk of the people were lamentably ignorant, and a few shrewd, clever knaves imposed on their ignorance for their own private greed and gain. Every village and hamlet had its wizard and fortune-teller, who consulted the oracle, and ruled the planets, and foretold coming events. I have been compelled to listen to ghost stories that ought to have frozen my blood, and made each particular hair to stand on end, but I am not a good subject for ghosts and ghouls and fiends to operate upon.

All these considerations must be weighed and valued if we would try to estimate the task our forefathers undertook when they introduced Methodism to the Fylde. They had to carry the Gospel to a hostile, unfriendly, and superstitious people. They never troubled their heads about the difficulties in their way, or the reception they were likely to have. They believed that the Gospel is "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth," and it was their business to proclaim it, and God Almighty's business to protect and foster His own truth.



II.

MARTHA THOMPSON,

THE FIRST METHODIST IN PRESTON.



ABOUT the year 1750 a respectable young woman named Martha Thompson resolved to leave her native town in consequence of domestic trouble, and take a situation as servant in a gentleman's family in London. She was then nineteen years of age, fair and attractive in appearance, of amiable disposition, and fairly well educated for her position in life.

Her mother had died some years before, and as her father had married a second time the old home had lost its charms for her. So she wrote to a lady in London who had lived in Preston, and obtained a situation in her family.

She started from home with her box of clothing and a few books, and travelled by the carrier's cart to Manchester. It was a formidable journey for one so young and inexperienced. The roads were full of holes and ruts that in dry weather nearly shook the cart to pieces. In wet weather the horses toiled through pools of water two or three feet deep, and bespattered the cart with slime and mud. The lonely lanes and wide moors were haunted by footpads and thieves ever ready to plunder the defenceless, while at almost every cross road the grinning skeleton of some malefactor swung in chains from the gibbet where he had been executed.

On through Chorley and Bolton the carrier's horses plodded

in safety to Manchester. Martha met the coach there and drove in safety to London.

She found her new home a very happy and comfortable place. She had a generous master, a considerate mistress, and four or five fellow-servants. For some time her life in London was quiet and uneventful, but very peaceful and happy. She was a diligent, faithful servant, who lived on good terms with her comrades, and won the confidence and esteem of her employers.

One day her mistress sent her into the City on an errand. She had to pass through Moorfields, which was then an open space that had escaped the builders' hands. Passing through the fields she saw an enormous crowd of people gathered in a compact mass round a preacher. As she paused to gratify her curiosity with such a strange sight, she heard the whole multitude break forth into song. It was such singing as she had never heard before. It came from thousands of human voices united in hearty and cheerful songs of praise.

Martha stood spell-bound and charmed by the singing of the multitude. Step by step she pushed her way into the crowd, forgetting all about her errand in the City. She could hear nothing but the melody of ten thousand voices united in song, and she could see nothing but the preacher and his extraordinary congregation.

The preacher was a small man, rather thin, with fine, sharply-cut features and closely-shaved chin. He wore a neat wig and a clergyman's gown and bands. He was mounted on a table in the centre of the crowd, and by his air of calm authority he arrested universal attention. He had a bright steady eye that seemed to command the multitude, and a mouth and lips indicative of firmness and decision of character.

His congregation was a motley crowd, gathered from the streets and slums of the city. Merchants and tradesmen had stolen away from business for half an hour to hear this famous preacher in Moorfields. Godly men and women who were seeking spiritual light and power in those dark degenerate days

had crowded round the table for that light and truth which they could not find elsewhere. Outcasts and thieves, who had not a home or a friend in the world, had returned like prodigals to the home of mercy they had so long neglected and despised. Bitter and persecuting opponents of the preacher were in the crowd also, but for once they were cowed and overawed by the multitude. In their anxiety to hear the preacher, they were crowded round the table in serried ranks as closely as they could stand. Some of them were very ragged and dirty, but they listened as attentively as their more favoured brethren.

After the first hymn had been sung the preacher offered a short prayer, full of earnestness and pathos, but without using a prayer-book. Then taking out his pocket Bible, he announced his text, and for about twenty minutes preached with great plainness and power. During the sermon many of his hearers wept; some sobbed as if their hearts would break; while others seemed afraid to weep or stir or breathe, lest they should lose a word.

Martha Thompson was riveted to the spot. That sermon had been all for her. It had shown her what she ought to be, and how far she was living below her privileges. It had destroyed her self-righteousness, and shown her the need of the new birth. Her conscience was awakened, and in her heart there rose the cry, "What must I do to be saved?"

The vast multitude had melted away before she remembered her errand to the City. She ran to complete her purchases, and hurried home as quickly as she could, with her mind full of the great truths she had heard and her spirit disturbed and anxious.

Her mistress reprimanded her for being so long away, and demanded an explanation. Martha frankly told her all. She described the preacher and the congregation and the sermon, and told what a powerful impression it had made on her mind.

Her mistress was a good Churchwoman of the old school. She believed in baptism and confirmation and communion,

and attendance at church, but she did not believe in repentance and regeneration and sanctification. From Martha's description of the preacher she knew it was John Wesley, who at that time was building up his Societies called Methodists. So as a good Churchwoman she took Martha aside and solemnly admonished her of the error of her ways. She warned her never again to listen to those Methodists, for they would drive her mad and ruin her soul.

Poor Martha was "mad" already, for she was under deep conviction of her guilt and need of salvation. She was "sore wounded by the Spirit's sword," and she must be healed. That first sermon had done all the mischief. It had opened her eyes, and aroused her conscience, and impelled her to ask and knock and seek for mercy.

In a few days she contrived to go again to Moorfields to hear Mr. Wesley once more. Under his second sermon her sense of guilt was taken away, and she was filled with joy and gladness. Her burden was removed, her soul was set at liberty, and she became a new creature in Christ Jesus.

She was so happy she could scarcely control her feelings. She wept for joy, and when the congregation sang the last hymn she was almost beside herself with gladness. That hymn is now the 650th in the Wesleyan Hymn Book—

"The Lord Jehovah reigns,
His throne is built on high;
The garments He assumes
Are light and majesty.
His glories shine with beams so bright,
No mortal eye can bear the sight."

The vast congregation sang this noble hymn to a popular tune that made the welkin ring on Moorfields, and when they came to the last verse Martha was in a transport of joy—

"And will this sovereign King
Of glory condescend?
And will He write His name
My Father and my Friend?
I love His name, I love His word;
Join all my powers to praise the Lord!"

How Martha found her way home she hardly knew. Whether in the body or out of the body she could not tell. She had lost all thought or concern about everything for a season but her own conversion. She went about her domestic duties with a countenance beaming with joy and gladness. She was so full of peace and joy that she told everybody that came in her way the good news of her salvation. Early in the morning and late at night and all the day through she was singing—

“And will this sovereign King
Of glory condescend?
And will He write His name
My Father and my Friend?
I love His name, I love His word;
Join all my powers to praise the Lord!”

Her fellow-servants endured this for a day or two, but they soon complained that Martha was mad and ought to be removed. Her master and mistress were sorely perplexed, and they sent for a doctor, who examined her and declared she was stark mad. So the following morning her master's carriage drove to the door and she was ordered to step in and accompany her mistress. They drove her to a lunatic asylum, and poor Martha soon found herself a prisoner for Christ's sake, and literally buried alive. Still her confidence in God remained, for she sang—

“I love His name, I love His word;
Join all my powers to praise the Lord!”

Her keepers were sorely puzzled with her. They cut off her hair and shaved her head, but she showed no resentment and bore them no malice. They had no need of strait jackets or dark cells or cruel restraints, for she was as gentle and harmless as a child. When she had not a friend in the world, and was shut up in that living tomb with no prospect of escape and no means of communicating with the outside world, she still sang her old song—

"I love His name, I love His word ;
Join all my powers to praise the Lord !"

God heard her cry and touched the hearts of her keepers. They listened to her story and relaxed the severity of her imprisonment. One day the master came into the room with a torn coat, and she begged him to let her mend the coat to find her employment. The matron supplied her with needle and thread, and Martha did the work so neatly that henceforth she was permitted to darn stockings and make herself generally useful with her needle in the asylum. Then she was permitted to come into the kitchen to help the servants. Thus she had an opportunity of securing a piece of paper and pen and ink. With these she wrote a letter to Mr. Wesley, stating her case and soliciting his help in regaining her freedom. For weeks she carried that letter in her pocket seeking an opportunity of posting it. One day a gentleman whose wife was an inmate of the asylum heard Martha's story and undertook to deliver her letter to Mr. Wesley. With characteristic energy he caused an inquiry to be made into Martha's condition, and in a few days she was set at liberty, when she sang her old song once more—

"I love His name, I love His word ;
Join all my powers to praise the Lord !"

She was free, but she was alone in London, and friendless. Mr. Wesley, with his usual good sense and prudence, asked her what plans she had in life, and how she intended to earn her living. She told him that if she could only find her way to Preston again she would commence business on her own account as a mantle-maker and milliner, and she had no doubt of her ability to earn her own living comfortably and honourably. He was travelling northwards himself at that time, so he mounted Martha on a pillion behind him, and rode with her on horseback till they found a carrier's cart that would convey her to her native town.

She commenced business at once, and the Lord prospered

her. All she touched turned to gold, and all her efforts were crowned with success.

She was the only Methodist in Preston, and her love for the communion of saints prompted her to seek the country round for some kindred spirits. There was a poor weaver at Cockshott House in the Ribble Valley, named William Livsey, who joined the Methodists about this time, and who became a spiritual magnet of considerable power. He attracted fifteen other persons to himself, and became leader of a Society class at Brimicroft. It was six miles from Preston, but Martha Thompson counted it a privilege to walk twelve miles every Sunday for spiritual counsel and help.

She had a neighbour named Mrs. Walmsley, who kept an inn in Church Street, and who went with her one Sunday and joined the little band of Methodists. Shortly afterwards Mrs. Walmsley's son, William, was converted and joined them. There were now three Methodists in Preston, and they earnestly desired a visit from one of the travelling preachers. The Haworth Circuit at that time extended from Otley, near Leeds, to Whitehaven, and included the whole of North and North-East Lancashire, Westmoreland, and Cumberland. The two travelling preachers had a Circuit 120 miles long by 60 miles broad; so that they were only able to visit the Societies occasionally. At first they came to Preston once in six weeks, and preached in Mrs. Walmsley's alehouse. She entertained them, and her son William became the first leader of the little Society, which numbered five members—two other females having joined them.

When Colne became the head of the Circuit, Preston had the preachers once a fortnight, and later service was held on Sunday at noon.

So the little Society at Preston grew and flourished. Meanwhile Martha Thompson had married Mr. J. B. Whitehead, a brassfounder and button manufacturer from Birmingham. Her new home was one of comfort and affluence, and she used her opportunities to promote the interests of Methodism

in her native town. She was hospitable to the preachers, devoted to the cause, and did her utmost to promote the work of God in the place.

A very remarkable story is told of one of her efforts to win her friends to Christ. Mr. Wesley was announced to preach at Chorley one week day, and she thought it would be a good opportunity for making Methodism known among her friends. So she hired a horse and conveyance at one of the inns in Preston, and invited her friends to go with her to Chorley. She packed up a hamper of provisions, with some of Mrs. Walmsley's good ale, and prayed that God would save her unconverted friends at Chorley.

The innkeeper who owned the horse and carriage had a young man named Christopher Briggs, who was ordered to drive the party that day. Now Briggs had a fierce hatred of Methodism, common to all the Fylde people at that time, and when he heard they were a party of Methodists going to hear John Wesley, he positively refused to drive them. The innkeeper told him that one man's money was as good as another man's money to him, and as Mrs. Whitehead was a neighbour of his and a good customer, he must either drive her to Chorley or he must quit his service at once. After a long parley, Briggs promised to go as his master ordered him, but he secretly swore he would upset the coach and break their necks.

The party filled the conveyance, stowed away the provisions under the seats, and drove away merrily out of Preston. They were soon in the country, and Briggs began to look out for his opportunity of upsetting them all. One would have thought he could have managed to work any mischief upon them he pleased, for it was a wretched road—full of holes and ruts and stone-heaps. On he drove at a fearful pace, rattling their bones over the stones, and jerking and jolting them fearfully. He expected every moment to be overturned, and was prepared to jump for his life and leave them to their fate.

But the coach had a charmed life that day. It would not

upset, and it did not break down ; but it drove triumphantly into Chorley, and set them down in safety. Briggs could not understand it. He did not know that Mrs. Whitehead had been praying for him, and that God's providence had been watching over him.

The hamper was unpacked, the ale was broached, and Mrs. Whitehead entertained her friends to a good dinner. Briggs was persuaded to join them, and under the influence of the good things provided he began to think these Methodists were not such bad people after all. He went with them to the service, and under Mr. Wesley's sermon he was led to seek and find mercy. He joined himself to the Methodists, and became a very devout and sincere Christian. For some years he lived in Preston and rendered valuable service to the cause.

Years afterwards he was travelling by coach from Staffordshire to Manchester, when he was upset and thrown violently to the ground. His leg was badly crushed, and had to be amputated. After the surgeons had finished their work, he turned to them with the greatest composure and said, "I thank you, gentlemen, for all the pains and trouble you have taken." Then turning to the Rev. Thomas Taylor, who stood by his side, he said, "Glory be to God, Who has gathered me unto Himself !" Then he was seized with convulsions and died.

It would be easy to multiply examples of this good woman's devotion to the cause of Christ. Through a long life she did what she could to bring sinners to Christ and build up her beloved Church. She was born in the year 1731, converted about the year 1755, and commenced business in Preston about 1757. She was a member of the little Society at Brimicroft in 1759, and continued to be a faithful and devoted Christian to the end of her days. She was tried in the fire of persecution, but she endured hardness as a good soldier of the Lord Jesus Christ. She bought her religion at a great cost, and she valued and treasured it accordingly.

Her children grew up to occupy positions of honour and

usefulness. One of her grandsons has been Mayor of "Proud Preston," and some of her descendants occupy honourable places in the Methodist Church to this day.

The evening of her life was spent in preparation for the life of heaven. With her lantern in her hand, and a child to lead her, she found her way to the early morning prayer meetings, and the services on winter nights. To the last she retained her love to Christ and her attachment to the people of her early choice.

She lived to be nearly eighty-nine years old, and I have spoken to old men and women who remember her at the beginning of the present century in a green and happy old age. Her declining years were passed away in great peace. She visited the sick, and ministered to the poor, and occupied her place in the sanctuary till the Master called her to the better land. She died at Preston in 1820.

And when, in age and feebleness extreme, she was waiting for the end, she gathered her children and her grandchildren round her bed, and begged them to sing her old song—

“ And will this sovereign King
Of glory condescend ?
And will He write His name
My Father and my Friend ?
I love His name, I love His word ;
Join all my powers to praise the Lord ! ”





III.

ROGER CRANE,

THE FOUNDER OF FYLDE METHODISM.



HE great wave of Methodist revival that swept through the land towards the close of the last century was a long time in finding its way to Preston and the Fylde country.

As early as 1749, London, Bristol, Leeds, and Newcastle became circuit towns, and the centres of religious activity and progress. From these centres devoted men went forth in all directions scattering the seeds of Divine truth, and as soon as it germinated into bud and leaf and fruit, other circuits were formed, and new schemes of aggression were planned and executed.

In 1753 Lincoln lighted a fire that was destined to illuminate the wide Vale of Trent, and penetrate the fens and plains of the East Coast.

In 1758 York set up the standard of Methodism in the East Riding, and carried the Gospel far and wide.

In 1765 quite a number of circuits were formed, including Barnard Castle, Bedford, Birmingham, Bristol, Manchester, Norwich, and Sheffield.

In 1768 Liverpool became the head of a circuit, and Bradford followed its example in 1769.

In 1773 a circuit was formed, whose centre was Haworth, in the West Riding of Yorkshire. Haworth was the home

of Grimshaw, the friend of Wesley, and though he was Vicar of Haworth, and had to preach in his own church, he was also a travelling preacher of more than ordinary ability and success.

In 1776 Colne became the circuit town, instead of Haworth. The preachers crossed the moors, and gave their attention to North and North-East Lancashire. They travelled through Burnley, Accrington, Bacup, Blackburn, Preston, Lancaster, Ulverston, Kendal, Settle, and Skipton, a tract of country now represented by about twenty-five circuits.

Thus, for more than a quarter of a century, Preston was outside the influences of Methodism, and had no regular services from John Wesley's preachers. Its position on the plan dates from the formation of the Colne Circuit in 1776.

The first preachers appointed were Samuel Bardsley and William Brammah. "Sammy" Bardsley was a man of one idea—a singularly good and simple-minded man—whose only mission was to preach the Gospel, and be the means of saving his fellow-men. He had a slight impediment in his speech, and but a limited acquaintance with English grammar and logic, but he was mighty in the Scriptures, and full of the Holy Ghost and of power.

Many good stories are told of Sammy's wit and wisdom, that should not be buried in oblivion. In one of his circuits the members imagined that he was scarcely good enough for their pulpits. They carped at his sermons, and criticised his style of preaching, and told him he must leave them at the end of the year. Sammy listened very meekly to all they had to say, and then, with a merry twinkle in his eye, he replied: "Brethren, the misfortune is—not that I am a poor preacher—but that you are poor hearers, and I intend to stay till you are better." And he did stay till they were not only hearers of the Word, but doers of it, and a gracious revival followed.

When he first came to Preston the town was a seething caldron of controversy and agitation. The various sects and

denominations were spending all their time and energies in trying to demolish each other. The Protestants were having a bitter war with the Catholics. The Churchmen were fighting the Dissenters, and among the Dissenters themselves a fierce and angry controversy raged on doctrinal questions.

It seemed as if the devil of discord had been let loose to ravage and destroy whatever of spiritual life and power had existed in the Churches. There was no charity to be found among them, and men who followed after peace, and desired to live in love and charity with their neighbours, were abused as traitors to their principles, and cowards in the cause.

Sammy preached in the streets, and gathered round him a crowd of angry, fiery zealots, who were ready to fly at each other's throats. The young bloods of the town laughed at his peculiarities, and bantered him about his learning. Every time he made a slip in his pronunciation they interrupted him, even during prayer, to ask: "Is that grammar?" "Is that logic?"

When he came to the sermon he apologised for his lack of knowledge, and regretted that he was only a student of one book. He understood there was a great battle being fought in the town on the nature and extent of the Atonement, and he wanted to throw a little light on the subject. If they would excuse him, he would stand aside and call witnesses of undoubted veracity and ability to speak for themselves.

"Isaiah," said he, "come and tell this people all thou knowest about the nature and extent of the Atonement."

Then in a tone of deep solemnity he repeated aloud passage after passage from the Book of Isaiah: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed." So he went on, quoting passage after passage, till the truth evidently touched the more thoughtful and serious of his hearers, and

then with a smile he turned to the conscience-stricken ones and asked, "Is that grammar? Is that logic?"

After Isaiah he called David, and Peter, and Paul, and John, and James, and quoted their teachings on the subject, till it dawned upon his hearers that his business was to preach the Gospel while other men were quarrelling and fighting about it.

Among those who came to hear him was a young gentleman named Roger Crane. He was then a stripling of nineteen, and when Sammy met the little Society, he presented himself among them and asked to be admitted into fellowship with them. He "desired to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from his sins;" so his name was entered on the class-book, and he received his ticket of membership.

This occurred in 1777, probably at Mrs. Walmsley's house, and it proved to be the most important event in the local history of Methodism.

Roger Crane, the only son of Thomas Crane, was born in Preston in 1758. His ancestors for more than two centuries had lived in the neighbourhood of Chorley and Preston, and had been highly esteemed for their public and private virtues. They were staunch Nonconformists and orthodox Presbyterians. In the great Civil War their sympathies were on the side of the Parliament, and in every effort to promote civil and religious liberty they nobly played their part. Like all the Nonconformists of their time they were terribly in earnest. When they drew the sword for conscience' sake, they grudged no sacrifice, they feared no foe, they asked no quarter, and they gave none.

Unlike many of their comrades in the fight for liberty, they were a race of educated men. They could always give a reason for the opinions they held, and they could generally hold their own in argument.

When Roger Crane was but a youth, the Presbyterian Church in Preston had been cursed with a spirit of controversy that was agitating the town. Its minister seems to have lost his spirituality, and to have wandered away into

the mazes of Humanitarianism and Unitarianism. Instead of proclaiming the great truths of the Gospel, and allowing them to have their due influence on men's minds and hearts, he went hither and thither hunting Will-o'-the-wisps of idle theories and foolish speculations, till he landed his Church in quagmire and bog. Eventually, he cast off all pretence of spirituality, and boldly proclaimed himself a high and dry Unitarian of the old school. By the weight of his personal influence he carried away some of the leading members of his Church and the trustees of the building in which they worshipped. Having the trustees on his side, he was enabled to defy his opponents, and continue in office long after he had ceased to preach the doctrines to which he was solemnly pledged. In the end the trustees betrayed their trust, and the chapel was handed over to the Unitarians.

Roger Crane and his father were the leading opponents of the men who betrayed the Church. They resisted both by argument and personal influence every effort to rob the Church of its spirituality, and so long as there was any hope of saving the sinking ship they stood by it. But when they found all their efforts were vain, they deserted it, and left it to its fate, and the building is to this day used as the Unitarian church in Preston.

Thus Roger Crane was cast adrift in an angry sea of controversy and unrest. He went hither and thither among the Churches of Preston, seeking spiritual food and nourishment, and settling nowhere. He knew the great truths of the Gospel as he knew history, or geography, or mathematics, but he was a stranger to its saving power. He remembered how his grandmother took him aside and prayed with him when he was but a child of six years old, and how she stored his mind with Divine truth. He called to mind how he and his two sisters had been the subjects of powerful religious impressions even in childhood, and he mourned that now on the dawn of manhood those hallowed influences had departed from him. Where could he find the light and truth for which his soul earnestly longed?

He felt he must be converted. What was the use of contending for a creed unless the truths he believed touched and hallowed his life? What must be the fearful responsibilities of those blind leaders of the blind who had landed him into the ditch!

Full of these thoughts he found his way among the Methodists. It was while on a visit to Leeds that he first heard Methodist teaching, and when he knew that occasional preaching services would be held in Preston, he resolved to cast in his lot among them.

It was a fortunate thing for himself, because it saved him from drifting away into error and sin; and it was a fortunate thing for Methodism, because it introduced a wise, and able, and willing apostle.

For some months he walked in darkness, and lived in bondage. He had travelled many miles to hear the truth, and one day he had an opportunity of stating his case to one of the preachers he heard in Yorkshire. The preacher saw that his mind was well stored with Divine truth, and if he could only start him on the right track he would soon be saved. After a lengthy conversation he said to Mr. Crane: "Brother, you are inverting the order of God. Remember it is, believe, love, obey; and you are trying to obey, love, and believe." That afternoon, while travelling alone, he saw the way of salvation in its simplicity, and consciously laid hold on the living Saviour.

Those who knew Roger Crane predicted that his would be no ordinary conversion. He had not cast in his lot with the poor despised Methodists in a passing fit of enthusiasm, of which he would repent on the morrow. He had enlisted for life, and he was destined ere long to take the foremost place in directing the energies and supplying the needs of the Church.

His father fully approved the choice he had made, and his two sisters shortly afterwards joined the little Society.

Their house from that time became the home of the Methodist preachers. "Sammy" Bardsley was succeeded

by Alexander Mather, and two years later he was succeeded by Christopher Hopper. It was during the ministry of Mr. Hopper that William Bramwell joined the Society in Preston.

Roger Crane was a year older than William Bramwell, and had the advantages of superior mental culture and logical acumen. He was comparatively wealthy, and occupied a good social position in the district. He was also a man of sterling piety, undaunted courage, and firm in his integrity. What he accepted and believed had been well weighed, and measured, and valued, before he accepted it. There was nothing in Roger's creed that would not bear the light of reason and of revelation. He would have nothing short of "Thus saith the Lord" as the authority and warrant for any truth he accepted. He had seen one Church scattered by the heresy and falsehood of its minister, and he did not mean to see another scattered in the same way. So that he became an authority in matters of doctrine, and a watchman to guard and defend the walls of his Zion.

William Bramwell was a simple-minded country lad, who had heard little and read less of those burning controversies of his time. He knew nothing about predestination and election, or Antinomianism and Socinianism. He only knew that once he was blind, and now he could see; and in the warmth and fervour of his first love he threw himself into the arms of Roger Crane.

These two young men, so different in learning and experience and worldly position, were drawn together by a common love to Christ, and a common zeal for His glory. They became as David and Jonathan. They formed a friendship that lasted all through their lives, and that was of incalculable value to each of them.

Roger Crane was made a class-leader very early in his career, and he introduced some of the most respectable of the early converts to the Church. His two sisters and several of their friends met with him in Christian fellowship, and their number increased till it was no longer possible to meet for public worship in private dwelling-houses. About 1781 a

room was hired over a packer's warehouse in St. John Street, Preston, and in this "upper room" the services were held for six or seven years.

Roger Crane and William Bramwell became local preachers about this time, and entered together on their evangelistic work. They found a kindred spirit in Michael Emmett, a young convert who assisted them "in introducing the doctrines and discipline of Methodism into many of the uncivilised districts around Preston," especially throughout the Fylde.

These three young men travelled to every village and hamlet of the Fylde, preaching the Gospel, enduring persecution, and laying the foundations of the Churches of to-day.

Mr. Crane took his stand on the fish stones in Poulton market-place one day to preach, when he was suddenly attacked by a mob and dragged to the ground. A score of rough strong men seized him and carried him out of the market-place, swearing they would drown him in a neighbouring pond. On their way they encountered a big brawny pugilist who demanded with an air of authority what all the row was about? Being informed that it was a "mad preacher" they were going to drown, he joined the sport with as little concern as if they were drowning a few hapless kittens. But suddenly remembering that Roger Crane was an occasional preacher, and a Methodist whose name was held in esteem in Preston for his kindness to the poor, he elbowed his way through the crowd, and demanded to have a look at him. The mob fell back under the influence of his ponderous blows on their heads and shoulders, and gave him an opportunity of recognising Mr. Crane. As soon as he saw it was his friend and benefactor, he bared his ponderous arms and fists, and with a fearful oath exclaimed: "I will knock the first man down that touches him." It speaks volumes for the discretion of a Poulton mob that they fell back like lambs, and permitted the pugilist to lead him to a place of safety.

From about the year 1780, the biography of Roger Crane is the history of Fylde Methodism. He devoted his time and talents and fortune to the cause.

His sister Mary married the Rev. Michael Emmett in 1786, and travelled with him in various circuits.

Miss Elizabeth Crane married the Rev. Charles Atmore in 1785. She was the twin sister of Mrs. Emmett, and won for herself a good name in the Churches, though she only lived seven years after her marriage.

Roger Crane was honoured with the personal friendship of Mr. Wesley. He entertained him in 1781, and again in 1784, when he visited Preston, and tradition tells to this day how the people lined Fishergate to see him pass, leaning on the arm of Mr. Crane and one of his preachers.

In 1787 the first permanent Wesleyan Chapel was erected in Back Lane, Preston. Mr. Crane had recently received from his father his allotted portion of this world's wealth, and was just about beginning business for himself. He generously devoted towards the building of this place one-fourth of his property, and spent much time and labour in begging for it and in superintending the workmen.

He commenced business in the iron trade, and prospered so wonderfully that in fifteen or twenty years he was able to retire from business and devote his whole life to works of mercy and the extension of Christ's kingdom. His early retirement from business surprised many of his wealthy neighbours in Preston. One of them stopped him in the street and asked him how much money he had saved. With characteristic shrewdness he replied, "I am richer than you." "How can that be?" eagerly inquired his friend. "Because I have *enough*, and you have not," was the reply. He was twice married, first to Miss Annet of Alnwick, who died within two years of her marriage, and afterwards to Mrs. Aspden, the widow of Dr. Nathaniel Aspden of Blackburn. Both his wives were pious, devoted women, who shared his enthusiasm and self-denial in the cause of Christ.

He had one daughter, the issue of his first marriage, Miss

Eliza Ann Crane, who married George Fishwick, Esq., of Springfield, near Garstang.

In 1790 Mr. Wesley paid his last visit to Preston and preached in Back Lane Chapel. Mrs. Michael Emmett had the honour of entertaining him. He was then in age and feebleness extreme, and had scarcely strength to preach.

In 1799 Preston became the head of a circuit, and for more than thirty years it had the benefits of Mr. Crane's generosity and experience and practical help. Those who knew him in his later years describe him as a fine type of an English Christian gentleman. He had a pale intellectual face, with aquiline nose, and snow-white hair, thrown back over a rather prominent forehead. His dress was the pattern of neatness and order, and his manners strikingly impressive. In the pulpit he spoke with great clearness and force. His style of preaching was expository, but he had a fund of anecdote and a wealth of illustration always at his command. He gave to Methodism a stamp of respectability and social position that it would not otherwise have obtained in Preston and the Fylde.

Roger Crane lived to see the fruit of all his early labours and persecutions. He kept up an intimate correspondence with Bramwell and Michael Emmett, the friends of his youth, but he survived them both. He died on the 15th of October, 1836, in the seventy-ninth year of his age. He was a man of cultivated mind, great energy of character, and an able expositor of the Scriptures. He was loyal to Christ and faithful to duty through a long and eventful life, and when he died, men began to realise the force and power of the truth: "The memory of the just is blessed."





IV.

WILLIAM BRAMWELL,

THE CHIEF OF THE APOSTLES.



WE take an early train from Blackpool to Poulton some fine summer's morning, and walk by Skip-pool, on Wyre, to Singleton, one of the prettiest villages in the North of England. As we stroll through the village, its neat white-washed cottages glisten in the sunlight, and its trim, well-cultivated gardens are fragrant with the perfume of flowers. We linger awhile to admire its stately mansion and park, with its handsome church and schools, set in a background of forest-trees crowned with luxuriant foliage.

Our four miles walk has been through shady lanes, skirting and occasionally overlooking the Wyre; but we resume our journey through corn-fields and pastures rich with all the wealth of approaching harvest. On, through straggling villages and sleepy hamlets, we pursue our way for three miles more, till we reach the village of Elswick.

We are now in the very centre of the Fylde country—six or seven miles from any railway station. Let us call on the Congregational minister here, and tell him we are on a pilgrimage to a Methodist shrine. He will invite us to sit and rest awhile, and he will entertain us with stories of his own church in the village.

Elswick has long been the headquarters of Nonconformity

in the Fylde. It has a very handsome modern church, erected as a memorial of those good clergymen who were ejected in 1662, in consequence of the passing of the Act of Uniformity. More than two centuries ago a pious clergyman was deprived of his living, and suffered imprisonment, for refusing to assent and subscribe to everything contained in the Book of Common Prayer. After his release from prison he was ordered to attend service at Kirkham Parish Church. To comply with the law, and save himself from further persecution, he attended service as an ordinary member of the congregation; but the vicar recognised him, and ordered him out of church. Gathering up his hat and Bible he marched out of the church, exclaiming as he went: "It is fiddle, and be hanged—and be hanged, if you don't fiddle." So he went over to the Nonconformists at Elswick, and troubled the Churchmen at Kirkham no more.

For more than two centuries the Elswick Nonconformist Church has been letting its light shine over the Fylde, and lighting successive generations to the better land. The venerable minister who feeds the flock to-day is widely known and deservedly esteemed. He is firm and unflinching in his attachment to the principles of Nonconformity, but he loves "all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."

With a hearty grip of the hand, and a fervent "God bless you," he sets us on our way out of the village. Three quarters of a mile from Elswick, on the road to Garstang, we reach Copp Church. It is a plain brick building, white-washed within and without, standing on an eminence that overlooks nearly the whole of the Fylde.

Let us call at the Vicarage and tell the worthy vicar that we are Methodist pilgrims. He will gladly have a chat with us, and take us to look at his church, for he is a spiritually-minded man who can recognise goodness and love it anywhere.

We are now at the birthplace of William Bramwell, the famous Methodist preacher.

He was born in a thatched cottage that stood in the lane leading from Elswick village to Copp Church, in February, 1759. That humble cottage was pulled down some years ago to save it from falling, and all trace of it is now lost. It was from that cottage that he rushed out mad with pain when suffering from smallpox, and flung himself into a horse pond on the other side of the lane. Along this lane he came every Sunday to the service at Copp Church, and took his place in the choir. It was in that gallery he used to stand on a footstool when six years of age, that his sweet voice might be heard by the congregation below. It was from that pulpit he first heard of God and heaven, and learned something about Jesus and His love. It was from this home of solitude that he went forth to be one of the most successful evangelists of modern times, and to lay broad and deep the foundations of Fylde Methodism.

Leaving Elswick and Copp Church behind, let us return by Great Eccleston to Poulton, and beguile our seven miles walk by talking about William Bramwell's life and work.

The Spirit strove with Bramwell when he was but a child. He had a very tender conscience, and was lamentably ignorant of Divine truth. He was fond of music, and flowers, and good books. He earnestly desired to love and serve God, but he had nobody to teach him, so he groped in the dark for very many years.

When he removed to Preston, he fell in with a number of Roman Catholics, and he tried their plans of finding Christ by penance, and self-denial, and self-mortification. He knelt on the sanded stone floor with his bare knees in an agony of pain while he prayed. He cut his flesh and kept the wound open, that the pain might remind him of his sin. He nearly starved himself to death by abstaining from food when fasting, but he failed to find peace by these methods.

Afterwards he returned to the Church of England and was prepared for confirmation by the Rev. Mr. Wilson of Preston. It was while he was receiving the Sacrament, and

"feeding on Christ by faith," that he first realised a sense of God's forgiving love.

But his joy was only short-lived. His musical ability was the snare that entangled him again in bondage. He was soon singing in public-houses, and bringing himself once more into condemnation and distress.

One evening in the winter of 1779, when he was nearly twenty-one years of age, he joined a company of less than a dozen Methodists who were assembled in a small house in Preston, to hear a travelling preacher. He was so impressed with what he heard that he went a second time and heard that grand old son of thunder—Christopher Hopper. He was mightily pleased with Mr. Hopper's trenchant, vigorous style of preaching, and on his third visit he said to Roger Crane, "Oh, this is the kind of preaching I have long wanted to hear; these are the people with whom I am resolved to live and die." He joined the little Society, and received his ticket of membership from the Rev. Andrew Inglis, the junior preacher in the Colne Circuit.

He did not at once find peace and rest. For some months he walked in darkness, but he diligently read his Bible and prayed without ceasing. About the latter end of April, 1780, Mr. Wesley visited Preston and met the little Society. Turning to Bramwell he said, "Well, brother, can you praise God?" Bramwell replied, "No, sir." He lifted up his hands and said with a smile, "Well, but perhaps you will to-night." These words were prophetic, for that night William Bramwell was made a new creature in Christ Jesus.

This was the turning-point in Bramwell's history. From that moment he cast in his lot unreservedly with the Methodists, and being baptized with the Holy Ghost, he became a living flame of fire.

The change wrought in him was marvellous. By nature he was of a gloomy, desponding temperament. He had passed through years of spiritual conflict and mental anguish, and at one time it seemed as if he never could rise and live above the troubles that oppressed him. But a shrewd old

Methodist in Preston taught him a lesson he never forgot. Finding him one day depressed and gloomy with looking on the dark side of things, he said, "I'll tell thee what'll cure thee, Billy. Go home, and lock thyself up in thy closet, and look back on all thy past life. If thou can find that the Lord has blessed thee with only one mercy, *praise Him for it.*" Bramwell took the old man's advice, and when he looked back on all the past he found not one, or ten, or a hundred, but ten thousand mercies to be thankful for, and he was soon singing with the Psalmist, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits."

From that time he was not merely pardoned, but sanctified. He was lifted above the clouds, and mists, and darkness that had enshrouded him for years, and he went on his way a burning and shining light.

He soon became remarkable for his sterling piety. He literally "prayed without ceasing, and in everything gave thanks." All his evenings and the whole of his Sabbaths were devoted to evangelistic work. He became a class-leader, and soon gathered round him a devoted band of godly men and women who were ready to go anywhere and do anything in the Master's service.

Shortly afterwards he became a local preacher. His first sermon was a solemn and powerful appeal to the unconverted, based on the text, "Prepare to meet thy God." Publicly and privately, he never ceased to warn sinners of the error of their ways, and exhort them to flee from the wrath to come.

He had many opportunities of exercising his talents, and for the next five or six years his labours were incessant. That period of his life, from 1780 to 1786, was the time in which he did so much for Fylde Methodism.

His apprenticeship had only just expired when he joined the Methodists, so that he had only the wages of a journeyman currier and fellmonger with which to maintain himself and support the Lord's cause. And yet out of his modest earnings he contrived to hire a horse very frequently to

carry him on his preaching expeditions. He visited Grim-sargh, Longridge, Ribchester, and every village and hamlet as far as Clitheroe and Blackburn. He preached at Salwick, Woodplumpton, Garstang, Kirkham, Poulton, and most of the villages of the Fylde. Often when his scanty purse would not afford the hire of a horse, he would walk twenty or thirty miles, and preach four or five times in the course of one journey.

It was in one of these journeys to Longridge and Ribchester in 1785 that he met with Ann Cutler, a poor hand-loom weaver, who was converted under his preaching, and became one of the holiest women of her times. She was known all over the Fylde as "Praying Nanny," and herself conducted services at Poulton, Thornton, Kirkham, and many other parts of this district.

A band of godly earnest men and women were raised up by Bramwell, and carried on the work after his removal from the Fylde. We must remember that many of the self-denying local preachers and leaders who succeeded Bramwell were his own spiritual children, who had caught his enthusiastic and devoted spirit. So that he not merely toiled five or six years for the people among whom he had spent his childhood and youth, but he trained and sent out his spiritual children likewise.

In estimating the magnitude and value of this work, we must try to realise the opposition and persecution he had to encounter. His own parents were bitterly opposed to him. His father fumed and stamped, and shook his fist in his face, and denounced him for joining the Methodists. His mother wept and sobbed as if her heart would break. His old friends jeered and derided him, and declared he was mad. But he bore it all with meekness, for he remembered that men said of his Master, "He hath a devil and is mad."

If they do these things in a green tree, what will they do in a dry? If his own familiar friends assail him, what about those outside?

Bull-baiting, bear-baiting, dog-fighting, and cock-fighting

were the Sunday amusements of those days. Big brutal bulldogs and mastiffs were kept chained up all week to make them more savage on the Sunday, and when they were not fighting each other they were deliberately set on the preacher. He wore knee-breeches and low shoes with buckles, and it is said he scarcely ever had a pair of stockings that were not torn by the dogs' teeth. His legs were bitten and torn by bulldogs till he was compelled to take a long staff spiked with sharp iron to defend himself. Long after his death that spiked staff was preserved as an heirloom in his family, and he was so terribly persecuted in the Fylde that to his dying day he could scarcely bear the sight of a dog.

Sometimes he was mobbed and pelted with mud and filth, and the poor defenceless women and children were hurled to the ground and trampled upon by a gang of roughs while they were listening to his sermon.

Still, in spite of brutal persecution and the vilest slanders, he toiled on with unwearied devotion and gratifying success. Here and there in lonely farm-houses and isolated cottages candles were lighted that gave light to all that were in the house. Men and women were converted who became centres of spiritual light and power in succeeding years.

Bramwell's success as an evangelist marked him out as a preacher. Roger Crane, who was a shrewd, sensible business man, and a good judge of character, was the first to tell him he ought to be a travelling preacher, and this view of his call to the ministry was confirmed and endorsed by the little Church at Preston.

But there was a second call more imperative and authoritative still. The great Head of the Church honoured his ministry and crowned it with gratifying success. His spiritual children were springing up on every hand, and almost every service was signalised by the conversion of sinners.

Thus there were two voices calling him to devote his life to the ministry, and yet he shrank from it as if he were unworthy and unfit. For months a fearful struggle raged in his soul between inclination and duty.

God had prospered him in business, and there was a fair prospect of success in life. He was engaged to be married to Miss E. Byrom, a young lady who had been converted under his ministry, and who was deservedly esteemed in Preston. He was now firmly established as an apostle in the district, and he questioned the wisdom of severing his connection with Preston and the Fylde. He consulted his friends about it, and Roger Crane told him that there could be no doubt he was called and qualified by the great Head of the Church to be a preacher ; he was also called and approved by the Church in which he laboured ; and he was sure that God by His providence would make a way for him.

Bramwell prayed about it. Tradition points to an old stone quarry near Preston in which he spent thirty-six hours in agonising continuous prayer, without meat, or drink, or rest, till God by His Spirit made known His will and purpose. And when he knew that the Lord had called him to forsake all and follow Him, he disposed of his business, sold all he had, and bought a horse and saddle-bags for his journey.

He was appointed to Canterbury at the Conference of 1786, and after many prayers and farewell greetings from his Preston friends, he mounted his horse and started on a journey of three hundred miles.

He found the glorious Gospel had the same power in the sunny South as in the sturdy North. He laboured a year in Kent with gratifying success, and then returned to Preston and married Miss Byrom.

Owing to domestic responsibilities and family cares, he could not accept his next Conference appointment to Lynn ; so he spent a year in business, and returned to the scenes of his early triumphs as a local preacher.

In 1788 he was appointed to the Blackburn Circuit, and from that time his labours in the Fylde terminated. He travelled successively in Colne, Dewsbury, Birstal, Sheffield, Nottingham, Leeds, Wetherby, Hull, Sunderland, Liverpool, London, Newcastle, and Salford, where he finished his work in 1818.

We may not follow him to every field of toil and conflict. With untiring devotion, and ceaseless prayer, he went into the great spiritual field to sow, and he came again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him. His labours were signally owned of God to the conversion of sinners, and the building up of His Church. He used to spend whole nights in prayer. He prayed for the conversion of men and women by name, for opportunities of evangelising certain villages and hamlets, for God's gracious help to be afforded to persons he knew to be in special danger and need, and for friends in distant lands beyond his reach.

For many years he kept a ledger account with heaven, in which he recorded side by side the many mighty blessings he had prayed for, and the strange and providential answers he had received. His record was not so much a journal, or diary, as a debtor and creditor account with heaven. It was a most remarkable document, showing that for years he had asked of God great and precious and specific blessings, and he had always received them. "There failed not aught of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel ; all came to pass."

Shortly before his death, in reviewing this record, he resolved to burn it, lest it should ever fall into the hands of men who should doubt his word, and ridicule his statements, and thus make God Almighty a liar. So he committed it to the flames, and thus deprived the Christian Church of one of the most remarkable documents that a good man ever wrote.

At the Sheffield Conference in 1811, under the presidency of the Rev. Charles Atmore, Bramwell publicly pleaded for his native Fylde. He told his love for the home of his childhood, pointed out the extensive fields that needed cultivation, and begged hard that the Rev. John Wright, who had done so much for Scorton during his ministry in Preston, might be appointed missionary to the Fylde. He pleaded long and earnestly, and in the end he was allowed to have his own way. The Rev. John Wright thus became the first

minister in the Fylde, and commenced his labours at Garstang in 1811.

Three or four biographies of Bramwell have appeared, but they are all unworthy records of such a singularly holy and devoted life.

“ ’Twas all his business here below
To cry, ‘Behold the Lamb!’ ”

Men misunderstood his character, and misrepresented his opinions. Even his colleagues were sometimes jealous of his success. But he toiled, and prayed, and denied himself, and lived every moment on the threshold of heaven. The storms of passion, and the strifes and controversies of his day, are hushed, and we can now see the man as he was—a simple-minded Methodist preacher, of immense popularity and amazing spiritual power and unvarying and remarkable success.

It is one of the most gratifying signs of the times that the story of such a life should be so widely and eagerly read. In the Methodist Churches of America his name is still fragrant and his memory green. And in our own land he is just beginning to be thoroughly understood and appreciated. He had no wealth or social position or learning to commend him. He gained and kept his position by the power of goodness alone. He was a striking illustration of the truth of the proverb, “Goodness is power.”

Bramwell died as he had lived—in intimate communion with heaven. On his way from the Conference at Leeds to meet the coach that should carry him to his circuit in Salford, the Master called him. Two watchmen found him early in the morning, in the lane, and carried him to a friend’s house, but the chariot of Israel had borne him to the better land on the 13th of August 1818, in the sixtieth year of his age, and the thirty-second of his ministry.





V.

MICHAEL EMMETT.



CENTURY ago there stood an extensive block of old property on the site of the present free library in Preston. It covered the whole of the space between the New Town Hall and Lancaster Road, and was at that time the best business part of the town.

The houses and shops were irregularly built, and clustered together in hopeless confusion. Innumerable "wynds," and "alleys," and "entries," and "yards" intersected this old block of property, and made it as difficult to penetrate as a rabbit-warren.

If a thief stole a valuable prize, and darted into one of these entries with a constable at his heels, he would turn and double upon his pursuers, and dodge about these wynds and courts till they had lost scent of him, and he could possess his plunder in peace.

Within this area were the shambles, and slaughter-houses, and stables of the butchers, and the rickety, tumble-down warehouses of the grocers. Many of the houses were only one or two stories high, lighted with small, leaden-framed, diamond-shaped window panes. Some of them were built of lath and plaster, with framework of wood, and foundations of stone.

The march of improvement has swept them all away, and instead of dark, dingy, stuffy shops, in which men could scarcely see or breathe, we have palatial establishments with plate glass windows and irresistible attractions.

Right in the centre of this bit of old Preston was a well known hostelry at that time with the sign of the "Ram's Head." It had a swinging signboard, with a rude painting of the head of a ram, and that there might be no mistake about it, the horns were not only painted, but decorated with gold. It was necessary to have an attractive sign in those days. For the people could not read, and their only chance of finding a particular inn was not in the name of the landlord, but in the sign above his door.

The "Ram's Head" was approached from the market-place by "Gin Bow Entry," a narrow passage through which a cart might be driven with great difficulty.

Mine host at that time was Michael Emmett, a thrifty, sober, steady man, who conducted his house in the old-fashioned style. He provided for "man and beast," and his "accommodation for travellers" was among the best in the town.

The half-famished traveller, who had driven on a biting day in winter from Lancaster or Kendal, would find a blazing fire, and a clean hearth, and a comfortable chair. One of Michael's sons would take the horse to the stable, and feed him and groom him, while Mrs. Emmett prepared a dish of ham and eggs and a cup of tea for her guest. The beds were clean and well aired, the provisions were abundant, and the prices were reasonable. So Michael Emmett did a roaring trade during those old coaching days by entertaining travellers.

The "Ram's Head" had a reputation for order and good government. Michael Emmett was a sturdy fellow, and very determined when he was on his mettle. He would serve no drink to those who began to show signs of having already had enough. He would harbour no persons of loose habits and bad character. If he refused to serve them, and ordered them about their business, they made off as quietly as they could to avoid further unpleasantness.

By good management, and strict attention to his house, he made a considerable fortune, and retired from business many years before his death. He belonged to an old Preston family, who for generations had been partial to the name of Michael. His customers would sometimes chaff him about the name, and they used to annoy him with a coarse doggerel that ran thus:—

“Old Mike, and young Mike,
And young Mike’s son ;
Mike’s son will be Mike,
When old Mike’s done.”

Young Michael Emmett, the eldest son of the landlord of the “*Ram’s Head*,” was born somewhere in Preston in 1759. He spent his childhood and youth in his father’s service at the inn, for he had nine or ten brothers and sisters younger than himself, and there was work enough to do in that busy hive of industry. When he was thirteen years of age he was apprenticed to a cabinetmaker and upholsterer in the town, and became an efficient workman at his trade.

Towards the close of his apprenticeship he became intimate with William Walmsley, the Methodist innkeeper in Church Street, and through his influence was induced to attend preaching services and class-meetings at their house. He was interested and pleased with these services, and began to read his Bible and all the Methodist tracts and publications that came in his way. He was a thoughtful, intelligent youth, with a retentive memory and keen perceptive faculties, and he soon made himself acquainted with the leading doctrines of Methodism.

But he shrunk from openly identifying himself with the cause for various reasons. His father was intensely conservative and averse to change. There had been a succession of Michaels in the family, who had all been steady, sober, thrifty men ; who had invariably been Churchmen and upholders of the king and constitution ; and if he were to take a new departure, there would be trouble at home.

He thought, too, of what it would cost to be a Methodist in the workshop. He would have to bear persecution, scorn, derision, and insult for Christ's sake, and perhaps be cast adrift in the world when his time of apprenticeship expired.

Still the Spirit strove with him, and the voice of conscience urged him to decision. He knew the path of duty, but he hesitated to follow; so he had an anxious troubled life for some months. He found the way of transgressors very hard.

At length he could hold out no more. He surrendered unconditionally, and made his peace with God. He joined the little Society towards the latter end of the year 1776, when he was in his twentieth year.

His father was greatly annoyed about it, and turned him out of doors. He vowed he would never own him or speak to him again, and he kept his vow for many years. It was not till towards the close of his life that he so far relented as to allow Michael £500 in his will, the amount he left to each of his children.

Young Michael Emmett was now an outcast and a stranger for Christ's sake. He was able to earn his own living at his trade, so he manfully resolved to labour with his own hands, and fight his own way through the world. He was a good-looking young man, of medium height, with a frank, handsome countenance, and a pleasing voice and manner. He spent most of his spare time in reading good books, and in the study of his Bible. He meditated and prayed much, till he became remarkable for his intelligence and piety.

Shortly after his conversion he formed a close and lasting friendship with Roger Crane, who was at that time seeking spiritual light and comfort. Having found the way of peace himself, and being full of zeal and devotion, he was a fitting companion for the thoughtful and intellectual young seeker after truth. These two young men were soon linked together in esteem and affection, and yet they were strangely unlike in character and habits.

They were about the same age, and were converted about

the same time, but they differed in all other respects. Roger was tall and thin. Michael was of medium height and inclined to corpulence. Roger had received a superior education; and had lived the life of a gentleman. Michael had but learned to read, and all he knew besides had been gained by self-denial and labour, for his had been a life of toil. Roger was slow to accept any man's teaching, and would believe no statement that was not warranted by the teachings of the Bible. Michael was quick to apprehend and apply truth to his own case without suspicion or distrust. Roger was cool, and calculating, and prudent. Michael was fervent, and demonstrative, and aggressive.

So they agreed well together. Each esteemed the other more highly than himself, and found in his friend the very qualities he lacked. As Michael lived in lodgings, and had no home of his own, he was a frequent visitor at Roger's house, and was treated almost as one of the family.

Just as this friendship was becoming close and intimate, another young man joined them. It was in 1779 that they welcomed William Bramwell into their band. He was of the same age as Michael Emmett, and nearly a year younger than Roger Crane. His peculiarity was his piety. He had little learning, and no social position, but he lived in intimate communion with heaven.

These three young men formed "a band." In the language of the old Methodists, a band was a kind of secret society within the Church into which certain parties voluntarily entered. They were always in close and intimate friendship with every member of the band. They told each other their hopes and fears, their joys and sorrows, their plans and purposes. They watched over each other in things temporal as well as in things spiritual. They prayed for each other by name so many times a day. They exhorted each other to diligence and self-denial and patience. They warned each other of lurking temptation or impending danger. They advised each other in times of perplexity, and they consulted each other in every difficulty. They relieved each other's necessities,

and made willing sacrifices for the good of the brethren. If any brother became wayward, and wilful, and seemed inclined to rush into sin, they never lost sight of him. Morning, noon, and night some of them would grasp his hand in holy freemasonry, and utter some word of warning or encouragement as the case might demand. So that when once a young man was soundly converted and joined a band, it was no easy matter to fall away again into sin. The fold was so carefully guarded, and the watchers were so vigilant, that the slightest signs of restlessness would be noted and checked.

One of the subjects talked about in the band was aggressive work for Christ.

Methodism had now three earnest, self-denying, pious young men in Preston, and they agreed that three of them might do something for the Master. They talked about a mission to the unconverted around them. They prayed about it, and finally began the stupendous task of missioning the Fylde country. They had no organisation to help them. They had no funds to sustain them. They had no friends to countenance them.

They had twenty or thirty villages, and hamlets, and towns, without a Methodist, or a spiritually-minded man of any kind, so far as they knew. And they had the Master's command: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." And they had the Master's promise: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

Small and feeble was the work at first, for they were untrained and imperfect workmen. But they gathered experience and confidence after a few years of preparation.

Michael Emmett became a local preacher about the time that his comrades were accepted, and he shared with them the honour of missioning the villages around Preston.

On one occasion he had a week's mission in the Fylde country as a holiday excursion. He obtained leave of absence from his employment, and through the kindness of a wealthy friend he was supplied with a horse for his journey. Start-

ing on the Thursday morning early from Preston, he rode in the direction of Lancaster, till he came to Garstang. It was market-day, and the farmers were assembled from every part of the district.

He rode up to the obelisk in the market-place, and while men were selling their potatoes, and grain, and produce, he preached Christ with great plainness and power. Many consciences were aroused, and many hearts were touched, and tidings of that sermon were carried to Pilling and Poulton, and every part of the Fylde.

At the close of the sermon a gentleman, well known at the time as "Quaker Jackson," spoke kindly to the preacher, thanked him for his sermon, and gave him half a guinea.

Michael Emmett said, "Friend, I do not preach for money."

The kind-hearted Quaker smiled and replied, "No, but thou cannot pay thy toll bars and keep thy horse without money. Keep it, lad, and go on with the work thou hast so well begun."

Thus encouraged and helped, Michael Emmett turned his horse's head in the direction of Scorton and Upper Wyresdale.

Among the hill sides and fells he gathered the shepherds and rustics, and preached to them in the evening. Some hospitable farmer took him in for the night and stabled his horse, and gave him the use of a bedroom on the ground floor, and the kitchen for preaching services.

For half an hour before the service was held the rustics gathered round the bedroom window in awe-stricken silence to hear the good man pray. He prayed that God's truth might visit in saving power the hills and fells of Wyresdale; that it might come like a mighty river and water Scorton; that it might linger in pools and floods of blessing at Garstang, and then find its way to every nook and hamlet in the Fylde. So the good man talked with God alone, and the ignorant shepherds outside wanted to know who was in the room with him, and why he was talking so earnestly.

They had not long to wait, for soon he came into the kitchen to preach to them fresh from his communion with the Master. He quickly arrested their attention, and enlisted their sympathies, as he told them the strange sweet story of the Redemption.

They were deeply interested as he told them of the sheep that had gone astray, and how the Good Shepherd had laid down His life for the sheep. He preached to them so lovingly, so tenderly, and yet so earnestly, that they were melted to tears. Strong men wept like little children, and some of them were converted, and their descendants are with us to this day.

Next day Michael Emmett went on his way in the direction of Lancaster, kindling fires that through God's mercy can never be put out.

This missionary journey, that still lives in tradition and story, must have occurred somewhere about the year 1784, when Michael Emmett was a promising young man of five-and-twenty. It was the first attempt to introduce the Gospel to the byways and hamlets of the Fylde country to the north of Garstang.

In 1786 Michael Emmett married Miss Mary Crane, the sister of his intimate friend Roger Crane. She was a gifted and amiable lady; sprightly, vivacious, and kindly. She had all the strength of mind, and keenness of perception, that distinguished the Crane family, with their devout and reverent spirit. She was about three years older than her husband, but she out-lived him ten years, and retained much of her graciousness and sprightliness even to hoary hairs. She entertained Mr. Wesley at her house in 1790, on the occasion of his last journey through Lancashire, and was the friend of all the leading Methodists who visited Preston during her residence in the town. Her ready wit, and lively repartee, and pleasing anecdote, and kind hospitality are matters of tradition and history to the present time.

Mr. Wesley desired to employ Michael Emmett as a traveling preacher, and after some correspondence he and his

devoted wife consented to leave Preston, and spend their lives in proclaiming the Gospel. His first circuit was Alnwick, where he laboured with great acceptance and success. He afterwards travelled at Bolton, Bradford, Wakefield, Sheffield, York, Wetherby, Birstal, Manchester, Lancaster, Dumfries, Brough, Carlisle, Glasgow, and Paisley, Norwich, and Prescot. His ministerial career lasted twenty-four years, and was cut short by failing health, induced by the hardship, exposure, and incessant labour to which he was exposed.

He became a supernumerary at Liverpool in 1815, and lingered in delicate health for upwards of thirteen years. During his ministerial career he laboured with great zeal and usefulness. His style of preaching was peculiarly fitted to arouse the careless, and impress the thoughtless. He was one of those born preachers who compel their hearers to listen attentively, and then lead them to thought and decision. He was called and qualified for the rough pioneer work of the Church, and for nearly a quarter of a century the Master signally owned and blessed his labours.

He died in Liverpool, March 23d, 1829, in the seventieth year of his age. During his last moments, and when he was suffering great pain, a friend whispered in his ear: "The Lord liveth, Who hath so long been your Rock." "Yes," he replied with emphasis, "and I shall soon be with Him for ever."

In a few moments more his heart ceased to beat, and without a sigh or a moan he passed away, to be "for ever with the Lord."





VI.

MOSES HOLDEN,

THE ORGANISER OF FYLDE METHODISM.



MOSES HOLDEN was born at Bolton, Nov. 21st, 1777, but his family shortly afterwards removed to Preston, where he spent the greater part of his life.

His father was a hard, stern disciplinarian, and ruled his children more by fear than love. He was in comfortable circumstances in life, but he was parsimonious and niggardly towards his children.

And yet he was very much concerned about their welfare, and took some pains to bring them up according to his own ideas and tastes.

On the long wintry evenings, to save candles, he would sit crooning over the fire, talking to his two boys, and telling them stories of heroism and devotion to duty. He had a rare stock of these stories, and the boys were never tired of hearing them.

One of these stories was about Jeremiah Horrocks, who in 1639 came to live at Hoole, a village five miles from Preston. He was a young man of twenty years of age, who had just finished his career at Cambridge, where he had distinguished himself by his knowledge of mathematics and astronomy. He had just been appointed village schoolmaster and curate of the parish, and he was content to toil six days a week for

forty pounds a year. He fitted up his bedroom in the farmhouse at Hoole as an observatory, and every night for many hours when the sky was clear he studied astronomy. In the course of his studies he learned that Kepler had predicted a transit of Venus in 1631, but did not live to observe it. Pursuing this subject, he predicted another transit of Venus about the 24th of November, 1639, and he resolved that he would see what human eyes had never seen before. Accordingly, he darkened his room and arranged his telescope some days beforehand, lest he should have made some mistake in his calculations. He wrote several letters to a young friend in Manchester, Mr. William Crabtree, who was also an astronomer of some ability. He pledged his friend to secrecy, as he might possibly have been mistaken, but he made all arrangements for the approaching visit of Venus to the sun. As the time drew near, he became nervous and excited, and his excitement increased when he found that the day predicted was Sunday, and he would have to preach in church. He spent every available moment at his telescope till the bell summoned him to service. Then quitting his post of observation he hurried away and conducted the service with reverence and devotion, for he was as good as he was clever. As soon as the service was over he hurried back to his telescope, and was just in time to see "a spot of unusual magnitude and of a perfectly circular shape upon the sun's disc." Thus he was the first to observe the transit of Venus, and in that darkened room at Hoole he saw what human eyes had never seen before and would not have an opportunity of seeing again for more than one hundred and twenty-one years.

About a year after this wonderful event Jeremiah Horrocks found an early grave, and science has mourned for him ever since. In his short life he did more for astronomy than any Englishman had ever done before, and through all coming time his name will be held in reverence and esteem.

This plain unvarnished story had a wonderful effect on the mind of Moses Holden. Just as a fallen rock or mass of earth may divert a mountain stream from its course and

change the whole direction of its career, so this story, coupled with another adventure, changed the whole life of Moses Holden.

Moses and his brother had been playing some boyish pranks with their companions one day, and bringing themselves into disgrace and trouble. Their father, forgetting that he had ever been a boy himself, and had got into scrapes in his time, treated them with great severity. He sentenced them to several days' imprisonment in the attic.

The two prisoners were marched to the top of the house with their slates, and pencils, and school-books. They had tasks allotted to them to occupy their time, and they were supplied regularly with their meals, but on no account were they to leave their prison.

It was dull work up in the attic solving problems and writing lessons. The skylight was opened, but they could see nothing but the clouds by day and the stars by night. As they sat in silence star-gazing, and wishing themselves back again among their companions, Moses said to his brother, "John, if we only knew the stars, we might be as happy with them for our companions as we used to be when we had our playfellows."

"Our father never gave us much chance of being happy with anybody," was John's reply, and then he relapsed into railings and murmurings at his father's tyranny.

Moses resolved there and then that he would distinguish himself in the study of astronomy. So, when his term of imprisonment expired, he ransacked Preston for books to aid him in his studies, and for lenses, reflectors, and instruments for observations. He spent all his pocket-money on text-books and materials, and in a little while he became tolerably proficient in his studies.

He made for himself a large and powerful telescope. He constructed an orrery with which he travelled through the district as a lecturer on astronomy. He also made a solar microscope of unusual power, and invented a number of ingenious instruments for observation. His lectures on optics

and astronomy were able and popular expositions of these branches of science, and he rose to such distinction that he became a member of several learned societies and received their thanks for his services to science. The people of Preston were so proud of him, that on the 3d of May, 1834, the freedom of the borough was presented to him amid the congratulations of the most influential burgesses.

While Moses was a young man of eighteen or nineteen, he fell in with Roger Crane, and, having been converted, he joined the Methodists in Preston. He soon became a local preacher, and was received with great favour and cordiality by the people. He was a man of striking originality and power, and in the villages and hamlets of the Fylde he preached with great success.

Moses was a remarkable man in many respects. He is described as a short, broad-set man, of strong physique, and stronger will. Whatever he undertook he would drive to a successful issue, or he would know the reason why. He had unbounded faith in God and indomitable courage. Once at Rawcliffe his persecutors let loose a vicious bull-dog to worry him in the street; but Moses stood perfectly still in the middle of the road, whistling the "Old Hundred," and staring the brute out of countenance. It came close to the good man's feet and then slunk away without touching him. In his days superstition had a mighty hold of the people. Every village had its ghost or its witch, and things uncanny were seen or heard by everybody. Astrology was professed and believed to an extent that we can scarcely realise to-day. When our present Queen was born, the astrologers consulted the planets and pronounced them so unfavourable that thousands of loyal people went about in tears for many a day, prophesying a short and terrible career for the infant princess. And if Moses had been a knave, he might have made a fortune by fortune-telling and ruling the planets. But he had a genuine love for learning and a passion for the study of astronomy, and, better than all, he had a large-hearted philanthropy that impelled him to seek and save his fellow-

men. By the kindness of Major Hincksman of Lytham, I have picked up a few extracts from a journal written by Moses in 1811. And let me here say that Moses expresses his opinions pretty freely about everybody he meets with, and gives us some curious glimpses of the condition of things three-quarters of a century ago. He says :—

“From the time of the Conference of 1810, the Rev. Thomas Jackson, superintendent of the Preston Circuit, never let me rest till I consented to go and try to open the Fylde country. Poulton was the only place where Methodism had made any way, and here there were ten members. These were given me to begin with, and I went down from Preston on the 19th of January, 1811. I got to Poulton about seven o'clock in the evening and was kindly received. Next day I preached at Thornton Marsh, morning and afternoon, and at Poulton in the evening. I had good times, and a large number to hear me. On the 21st of January I preached at Little Marton, and then in every little town and village through the Fylde I preached and formed classes.

“When I got to Lytham I found a house licensed for preaching (Mr. Mercer's, in Bath Street). I understood a Mr. Lyon had got it licensed, and preached in it a long time before, but it had been given up. However, I opened it again, and had good congregations, but a deal of persecution. The clergyman of the parish came to the house and kicked up a great stir, demanding the licence. They showed it to him, but he puffed at it, and talked of stopping them. Mercer's daughter told him he could not stop them, for the licence would stand good for that house as long as there was one stone upon another. Then he went to Squire Clifton, and asked him to put a stop to this Methodism, and get Holden sent out of Lytham. But Mr. Clifton said, ‘I shall do no such thing. Let them alone, or I may put Holden into your place.’ He troubled us no more after that.

“I was often sorely tried with the people at Thornton Marsh. They took it into their heads that I must be proud, because I had always a good coat on my back ; and so

they would try to humble me. One wet day they said, 'Will you put on James's smock-frock to preach in?' And I had to put it on. Another time an old woman in a red cloak said, 'Will you have my cloak?' I said, 'Ay, and bonnet too, if you like.' After that they came and said, 'You must preach from such a text to-night.' I did as they wished for many a time, and they told me afterwards they had done it to try me.

"At Bispham I was persecuted by the clergyman. One day when I had to preach there, some of the people begged I would not go, for Mr. Elston said he would have me put in prison. I said that would be an honour. I went and preached without any disturbance. Another Sunday, Mr. Morrow, the Calvinist minister at Poulton, sent word that I had better not go to Bispham, for he was well assured that the clergyman had engaged several men to kill me, and they were to have ale and rum mixed to fit them for their work. Many came to me to persuade me not to go, but I said, 'I will go. I shall not be the first by many to suffer for the sake of Christ.' Two or three stout men refused to go with me, for the clergyman had threatened to law every one who either lent me a chair or allowed me to stand on their horse-block. So John Tomlinson took me in his shandray, and I had it for my pulpit. I gave out the hymn—

' Shall I, for fear of feeble man,
The Spirit's course in me restrain?
Or, undismayed in deed and word,
Be a true witness for my Lord?'

When I gave out the second verse—

' Awed by a mortal's frown, shall I
Conceal the truth of God Most High?'

a number of men made their appearance from behind some bushes. The people about me were alarmed, but the men made a halt as though they would go away. So I called out to them and said, 'You had better come nearer. I am not very well, and may not be able to make you hear at that

distance. Perhaps you are afraid of a disturbance, but there will not be any. The laws of the land and God will protect us.' They stood there all the time, and I went through the service in peace, and had a large congregation.

"From the time I went down into the Fylde, in January, until the following Conference, I had opened the whole of the Fylde country from Lytham to Pilling, and formed classes in the different villages. The following is a list of places and members in Society :—Poulton, 11 ; Preesall, 16 ; Rawcliffe, 2 ; St. Michaels, 7 ; Kirkham, 8 ; Marton, 7 ; Thornton, 17 ; Freckleton, 12. I never could prevail on the Lytham people to join the Society. They received me kindly, and heard me gladly, but that was all. At the Conference of 1811, I gave up my work to the Rev. John Wright, the Fylde missionary appointed to Garstang."

The first member of Society at Poulton was Betty Tomlinson, wife of John Tomlinson, butcher of Poulton. She had some conversation with a few devout and honourable women that first directed her thoughts to religious matters. One day while she was in a "gad house," or place for shelter for cattle in the field, praying, she was converted. She found two or three pious women in the neighbourhood, and met with them for private prayer. Her husband was bitterly opposed to the Methodists, and used to lock her out of the house every time she went to pray, but that did not cure her. Then his suspicions were aroused, and he began to think these good women met for something worse than prayer and fellowship. But he would find it out ; so he managed to conceal himself in the house where they met, and spent an evening watching them in secret. On the principle that "listeners never hear any good of themselves," he had a bad time of it. These holy women prayed for him by name, and asked God to change his heart, and make him a new creature in Christ Jesus. He began to cry for mercy, and came out of his hiding-place a conscience-stricken penitent. He soon found mercy, and joined his wife in faithful and devoted service for the Master.

He entertained Moses Holden at the time of his visit in 1811, and drove him to various villages on his preaching expeditions. He was the first leader at Poulton, and the little class consisted of John and Betty Tomlinson, Margaret Campbell, Mr. and Mrs. Carter, and their daughter. They were not long permitted to worship in peace in the small room they used as a chapel. The mob smashed all the windows with stones. They broke into the chapel and dragged the pulpit into the market-place, as a delicate hint that the Methodists did not need a chapel when they preached so often in the market-place. They heaped every form of contumely and insult they could devise on the heads of these poor Methodists; but the more they persecuted them, the more they multiplied and grew.

When Moses Holden was among them, they required him to preach from Acts xxviii. 22: "But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against." And yet there were some noble men and women raised up from Poulton.

John Stirzaker, the son of a labourer at Poulton, was converted during the great revival. His mother, to keep him away from prayer-meetings and class-meetings, locked him up in the bed-room. But love laughs at locks and bars, and the lad let himself down from the chamber window, while his mother was abusing him and pelting him with turf from the turf-stack. He bolted like a greyhound across the field and into the Methodist chapel. She followed him, and dragged him out of the service by the hair of his head, and beat him till he was black and blue, but she could not cure him of his madness. He became a Methodist preacher, and years afterwards, when he came to preach special sermons at Poulton, her matronly instincts so far overcame her bigotry as to permit her to go and hear him preach. She was a fair sample of the average matrons of the Fylde. They would rather their sons enlisted for soldiers, or their daughters lived in shame, than they should join the Methodists.

Modern readers of Moses Holden's diary are puzzled with

the name of Thornton Marsh. There is no marsh at Thornton in these days. It is now a quiet, clean, well-cultivated village, covered with cottages and gardens, and thousands of excursionists to Blackpool drive to Thornton to admire its pretty church and rustic surroundings. But three-quarters of a century ago, there was a marsh occupying the centre of the village. The land lies only a few feet above the level of the sea, and as the sea fence was very imperfect at that time, and the Wyre occasionally overflowed its banks, the village was badly drained. On the edge of the marsh lived Nanny Greenwood, the mother of Mrs. Tomlinson of Poulton. The thatched cottage still stands near Thornton Mill, and it was the scene of the first Methodist class-meetings and prayer-meetings. Nanny was one of the first members of the Society in Thornton, and she entertained Moses Holden during his visits to the village. One night as they were having a prayer-meeting in her cottage, the rough young fellows climbed to the top of the roof, and dropped a goose down the chimney. It beat its wings and swept the chimney effectually in its descent, filling the room with soot and smoke ; but as soon as it landed on the hearthstone and found itself among some pious Methodists, it made itself at home, and squatted peacefully at their feet till the meeting concluded.

The first members of Society were Rebecca Croft, Bradshaw Croft, John Charnley, Richard Charnley, Betty Charnley, Ben Wilding, Nanny Greenwood, and John Bleasdale. Nanny Greenwood's son, William, was converted at home, and carried Methodism to Darwen in Lancashire.

In 1812 a chapel was built at Thornton. It was a plain barn-like structure, whitewashed within and without ; but it stands to-day the oldest Wesleyan Chapel in the Blackpool Circuit. At that time the members scattered over a wide area of the Fylde had no other place of worship, and many a long, wet, dirty walk they had to prayer-meetings, class-meetings, and preaching services.

In 1819 a chapel was built at Poulton, and was used

instead of the small room behind the King's Arms Hotel. For a few years the Society was small and poor, but a very gracious revival visited the place, and scores of young men and women were converted. John Stirzaker, Richard Crookall, John Smith, Edward Smith, James Smith, George Singleton, Richard Seed, James Thornton, William Seed, and many others, were the fruits of that revival.

Moses Holden lived long enough to see the churches he had organised in a vigorous and flourishing condition.

In his later years he became self-willed and opinionated to such a degree that few people could manage him. He was a personal friend of Joseph Livesey, of Preston, when he first took up the Temperance cause. So long as they preached and advocated moderation only, he was chairman of the Temperance Society, and one of its most ardent supporters. But as soon as they introduced the pledge of total abstinence, he would have no more to do with them. He followed his own opinions and convictions, and left them to do as they pleased.

This incident is a fair sample of the man. In temperance, religion, politics, and social questions of every kind he had the same contempt for other people's opinions, and the same regard for his own. So that he alienated many of his old friends, and said and did things that were widely regretted.

Still, justice and charity demand our meed of praise and our tribute of respect for the work he did. According to his views of truth and righteousness, he was faithful and devoted in his service to his day and generation.

He lived to a good old age, and died in great peace ; and in the preparation of these sketches I have been surprised to find what a warm place he has in the affections of his spiritual children.





VII.

DEVOUT AND HONOURABLE WOMEN.



SHORTLY after the old Back Lane Chapel was opened at Preston, in 1787, Mary Barrett and Ann Cutler conducted special services there that became memorable in the history of Fylde Methodism.

Mary Barrett was a native of Colne, the circuit town. Her father was comparatively wealthy, and occupied a good social position in the town; but he was a very bigoted, intolerant Churchman. He regarded John Wesley as a renegade Churchman, who had sold himself to the devil, and solemnly warned his children to turn a deaf ear to all Methodist teachings. But, when Mary became a young woman of two or three-and-twenty, she was powerfully impressed with her need of spiritual light and power. She read diligently, she attended faithfully to all the ritual and ceremonies of the Church, and led a life of strict self-denial and self-mortification. But she failed to find peace or rest till she heard John Wesley preach and expound the simple plan of salvation by "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." She soon found the way of peace, and cast in her lot with the poor despised Methodists. Her father was almost beside himself. He tried all the arts, and blandishments, and temptations of wealth and pleasure, to draw her away from their Society. Then he solemnly warned, and exhorted, and threatened her with his anger

and displeasure, if she did not return to the Church of England. But, finding that his promises would not draw her away from Methodism, and that his threatenings would not drive her away, he finally lost his temper with her, and turned her out of house and home for ever. He utterly disowned her, and drove her from the parental roof into the cold world a pilgrim and a stranger. She was young and inexperienced. She had considerable personal attractions, and had received a liberal education; so her father hoped that his rigorous severity would soon bring her in submission to his feet, with a promise that she would abandon those "mad people" for ever. But she had learned to count it all joy when she was called to suffer persecution for righteousness' sake. She packed up her clothes and a few books in her box, and left the home of her childhood like Abraham of old, not knowing whither she went.

For years she never had a home. First, one kind-hearted Methodist and then another took her in and lodged her for awhile, and she used to sing:—

"How happy is my pilgrim's lot!
How free from every anxious thought,
From worldly hope or fear!
Confined to neither court nor cell,
My soul disdains on earth to dwell,
I only *sojourn* here.

Yonder's my house and portion fair:
My treasure and my heart are there,
And my abiding home;

.
I lodge awhile in tents below;
Or gladly wander to and fro,
Till I my Canaan gain."

So completely did she enter into this pilgrim spirit that for years her life seemed a race for heaven. She refused to listen to any offers of marriage, or to entertain any suggestions that would link her to this life. So fully was she prepared to leave this world, that she packed up her

shroud in her box, and carried it from place to place, to be in readiness for her departure whenever the Master should call her. But He had other work for her to do. Her talents and her piety eminently fitted her for usefulness among her lost and neglected sisters. She began to work as an evangelist, and so popular did she become, that multitudes flocked to hear her, and hundreds and thousands were converted through her instrumentality. In later years she married Dr. Taft, and rendered valuable services to Methodism till the end of her life.

Her services as an evangelist led to her employment as a preacher, and she occupied many of the most important Methodist pulpits in the land with great acceptance and success. The employment of female preachers gave offence to many members of the early Societies, and a fierce controversy raged round Mary Barrett's name and mission for some years. When the controversy was agitating the preachers, she preached, by request, before the Conference, and Dr. Adam Clarke was so pleased with her sermon that he patted her on the back, after she came out of the pulpit, and said, "Well done, Mary; go on with your preaching, and the Lord will own and bless your efforts."

Ann Cutler was a poor hand-loom weaver, born at Thornley, near Longridge, in 1759. She received but a scanty education, and had little natural ability. She was converted under the powerful preaching of William Bramwell, and by strict self-denial and self-discipline she became a woman of strong faith and mighty power in Methodism. The hand-loom weavers of a century ago were poor toilers, who knew little of life's pleasures and possessions. Seated at the loom from early morning till late at night, toiling with unwearying monotony the week through, for a miserable pittance that would scarcely keep them from actual starvation, they had more than their share of life's toil and drudgery. Ann Cutler lived on the meanest fare, and dressed in the plainest garb; but, like her more favoured sister, Mary Barrett, she "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder

and Maker is God." She was a pilgrim and a stranger on earth, as all her fathers were. She had but one talent, and she used it wisely and well. She could pray with such faith and power that people were strangely moved; stout hearts yielded, and sinners were saved, wherever she went. The Fylde people nicknamed her "Praying Nanny," and said she was mad. It was to them a mystery how she escaped the rough horse-play and brutal persecution that was the common lot of the Fylde Methodists; and they never could understand the secret of her success as an evangelist. Their ringleaders were converted before they had time to play the pranks they had carefully rehearsed for the occasion, and "fools who came to scoff remained to pray." Physically she was a young woman of medium height and build, of comely appearance, plain and neat in her dress, and of a very modest, retiring disposition. Her prayers were pithy, pointed, and practical. She seldom prayed for more than two or three minutes, always in a distinct and rather loud voice, and with great definiteness and precision. She knew exactly what she wanted, and she never rested till the Master said to her, "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

William Bramwell made use of her services in several of his circuits; and she visited almost every village and hamlet of the Fylde. As her fame increased, she was invited to all the leading chapels in the North of England; and in spite of bitter persecution and the vilest slanders, she laboured with unvarying success for some years. While on a visit to Macclesfield, she was seized with her mortal illness. When she realised that her end was approaching, she said, "It is enough. Well done! Welcome life, or death, or sickness, just as seemeth good in the sight of the Lord." Her life's breath had been prayer; and it seemed fitting that her dying breath should be praise, for her last words were, "Glory be to God and the Lamb for ever!" She literally wore herself out in ceaseless activity and unflinching self-denial, and escaped to the better land at the early age of thirty-five.

The vicar of Christ Church, Macclesfield (Rev. David Simpson), placed a brass memorial over her grave, with the following inscription:—"Underneath lie the remains of Ann Cutler, whose simple manners, solid piety, and extraordinary power in prayer, distinguished and rendered her eminently useful in promoting a religious revival wherever she came. She was born near Preston, in Lancashire, and died here, December 29th, 1794. Aged 35."

These two remarkable women were eminently successful in their evangelistic work at Preston; and many strange stories are told of extraordinary conversions at that time. Mary Barrett preached with masculine eloquence and womanly tenderness; and Ann Cutler pleaded and prayed with overwhelming power. People came from all the country districts, and carried the tidings of the Gospel to every village and remote dwelling of the Fylde.

A farmer's son, named Lawrence Disley, thirteen years of age, was ploughing one day at Salwick with his father, when he heard that these two good women were holding a service at Preston that night. He put his horses in the stable and finished his work by six o'clock, and then ran six miles to the old Back Lane Chapel to hear them. That night he was converted, and began a career of religious activity that only ended when he died at Poulton, an old man of eighty-four. He was the class-leader at Poulton for many years, and rendered faithful service to Fylde Methodism for more than half a century.

His brother, Bartholomew Disley (or Bartle, as the Fylde people called him), was converted at the same time, and became a very acceptable local preacher. In his day there were no circuit plans and no regular stated congregations in the Fylde. So Bartle used to saddle his horse on Sunday morning, and pray that the Lord would direct him that day to his work. Then he would go on to the high road and put his staff on end, and let it fall as it would. Then he would mount his horse and ride away in the direction indicated by the fallen staff till he found a congregation. He was a strong, vigorous,

active man, and by his outspoken vindication of the Gospel he became a terror to evil-doers, and a power for good wherever he went.

These conversions in the Disley family at Salwick formed a most important link in the chain of Providence that bound Preston to Fylde Methodism. The whole family joined the Methodists, and their hospitable house was known as the "Pilgrim's Inn," where the preachers and evangelists were entertained.

Lawrence Disley's mother and sister became devout and honourable women, and they scattered the seeds of truth among the wives and daughters of the Fylde to an amazing extent. They spoke about spiritual things in highways and byways, in cottages, and fields, and markets, wherever they could find a friend or a neighbour to listen to them. These wayside conversations were often as eventful as Philip's interview with the Eunuch on his journey to Ethiopia. They lighted many a candle that was set down by Providence to give light to a whole village.

Mrs. Mary Cumpsty was another devout and honourable woman who rendered invaluable services to Fylde Methodism. She was born in Liverpool in 1799. Her parents were Wesleyans, and she was converted when only seven years old. She was twice married, and her second husband was John Cumpsty of Preesall. He was the son of a farmer of considerable wealth, and ought to have inherited some thousands of pounds on the death of his father. But the old man took offence at his son's choice of a wife. She was a "town" woman, and had not been used to country life. She knew nothing of farming, and could not make cheese or butter to satisfy him. And worse than that, she was a Methodist. He could never forgive his son for marrying such a woman, so he cut him off with a shilling, and the young couple were all their lives persecuted for righteousness' sake. But if John Cumpsty lost his fortune for his choice of a wife, he had a treasure of a wife in his Mary. She was a tall, handsome, and graceful woman ; well read,

and well educated. She ably assisted him in business in Liverpool, as long as he had health and strength. She nursed him through a long and costly illness, and maintained him by her own efforts till his health was restored. It was in consequence of his illness that they returned to Preesall, and came in close personal contact with Mrs. Ronson, another devout and honourable woman who figures in the history of the Church.

At that time Fleetwood was an immense rabbit-warren, and not a single human dwelling was to be found on the site of the present town. In the direction of Cleveleys and Thornton a few scattered farmhouses and lonely huts were to be found, but all the signs of life and activity were to be found over Wyre. At Preesall the Customs' officers for the district resided, and they exercised sway from Pilling to Wardleys and Skippool. The officer at this time was Mr. Ronson, and his wife was the first Wesleyan Methodist in Fleetwood. During her residence at Preesall she was a member of the Society at Pilling, and regularly walked three miles to class-meeting, prayer-meeting, and preaching service. She was a hale, strong woman, of medium height, fairly well-educated, and of genuine piety, but of rather sorrowful spirit. She had to endure bitter and relentless persecution for her attachment to Methodism, but she bore it bravely to the end. Her husband would often allow the fire to go out, and betake himself to bed, on a winter's night, when he knew that she was on her way home with her lantern from a prayer-meeting at Pilling Chapel. As she was practically denied spiritual privileges at Pilling by his conduct, she opened her own house at Preesall to the Methodists. She had a cottage, with a large old-fashioned kitchen, and she soon gathered good congregations. The Garstang preachers, on their way to Pilling, called every alternate Saturday night, and preached in her house. Prayer-meetings were held every Sunday evening, and in the summer time field-preaching services, camp meetings, and temperance demonstrations were held. Conversions took place, great good

was done, and a small Society was gathered. When the first few houses in Fleetwood were erected, Mr. and Mrs. Ronson went to live there, and she thus became the first Methodist in the infant town.

It was not till about 1837 that Sir Hesketh Fleetwood conceived the idea of transforming a barren rabbit-warren into a flourishing town and port that might one day rival the ancient port of Lancaster, or even the modern Liverpool.

John Cumpsty was one of the first workmen who offered his services in the new enterprise. In the summer of 1837 he worked on the site of the new town, and slept many a night in a small hut on the sandhills, used by the lime-burners. He helped to mark out the streets with a plough, and to build the first house that was erected. It is now Mr. Richard Warbrick's shop, at the corner of Church Street and Dock Street. It is a place of historic interest in Fleetwood, as we shall presently see. In 1838 the town consisted of about twenty houses. These were crowded with workmen and their families so inconveniently that each separate room was occupied by a separate family, and houses that are now worth three shillings per week were then letting for sixteen shillings. Among the early settlers in these new houses were the Customs' officers from Preesall, and Mr. and Mrs. Ronson took a house that became the home of the infant Church. Their colleague, Mr. Roskell, also took a house, in which the first baby was born in Fleetwood. It may interest the curious to know that Isabella, daughter of Robert Roskell, was the first child born in the place. She is now living, I am told, somewhere in the North of England. One Sunday morning, a local preacher, named George Singleton, came over from Preesall, at Mrs. Ronson's invitation, and preached the first Methodist sermon in the town, from the words: "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." This preacher, George Singleton, was one of the men converted at Poulton during the great revival, and for years he rendered good service to Methodism.

In the latter end of 1838, the Rev. George Hughes, of

Garstang, visited Fleetwood twice on the Monday, and preached from Mrs. Ronson's door to the workmen during the dinner-hour. In December, 1838, Mrs. Cumpsty removed from Preesall to Fleetwood, and opened the first school in the town. It was one room in the house now occupied by Mr. Warbrick, and she had only the use of it during the usual school hours. For this privilege she paid three shillings per week. Thus there were two Methodists in the town. In 1839 the church and Euston Hotel were commenced, and the town was springing up rapidly. A room on the site of the present new post-office had been built and used as a store-room, but during the erection of the church it was used for occasional services, and the Rev. Mr. Turton, Vicar of Thornton, preached there occasionally. One day, Sir Hesketh Fleetwood called on Mrs. Cumpsty, and finding her little room crowded with children, offered her the use of his larger room, on condition that she would clean it and put it in order for the services on Sunday. It was at this time that the first class-meeting was formed. Its leader was John Taylor (a namesake of mine), a shoemaker of Thornton. He was a good man, and went regularly, every Monday evening, to meet his little flock. After years of faithful service in England, he and his family emigrated to America. The first class-meeting consisted of John Taylor, Mrs. Ronson, Mrs. Cumpsty, Mrs. Threlfall, and Daniel Collison. The infant Church now numbered a dozen; and as they had to walk to Thornton on Sunday afternoons to hear a sermon, they sent a request to the Garstang quarterly meeting for a preaching appointment on the plan. At first it was only fortnightly, on the Saturday night and Sunday morning, to suit the convenience of the preacher on his way from Garstang to Pilling.

About 1839 Mrs. Ronson returned to Preesall, and there died. The infant Church was then removed to Mrs. Cumpsty's house, and she became the central figure in this interesting group. For years she kept a well-written, sensible journal of her life and experience, from which I have been permitted,

by the courtesy of her son, the present customs' officer in Fleetwood, to glean many interesting facts. She tells us that one Monday evening a stranger came to her house to the class-meeting, and took part in the service. At its close he told them that he was a Wesleyan Methodist local preacher from Liverpool. His name was Thomas Heaps, and he was a joiner and builder by trade. He had come on a visit to Fleetwood, to see if it afforded an opening for him in his business. Having heard that a few spiritually-minded people met for worship in that house, he wished to join them; and if he decided to settle in the place, he would cast in his lot among them. Shortly afterward he came to reside in Fleetwood, bringing his wife and child and servant to swell the little flock of Methodists. Mr. Heaps was a valuable addition to the infant Church. He was a man of more than ordinary intelligence and ability. He was fairly well off, and could afford to make considerable sacrifices for the good of the cause. He built a large workshop in Back Church Street. It was an upper room approached by a flight of steps from the outside, and was well lighted and ventilated. As soon as it was completed, he offered the use of it for preaching services on Sundays, and his own men fitted up seats and benches. A desk, made to fit a chair back, served as a pulpit, and when all the timber and materials were taken out of it, and the space utilised to the utmost, it was capable of accommodating about 150 people. Services were first held in this workshop in 1840, and were continued regularly there till 1846. In 1841 a Sunday school was opened in this workshop. There were ten or a dozen scholars the first day, but the numbers rapidly increased. Mr. Fishwick's family, of Scorton, took a lively interest in the new Society at Fleetwood. They visited Mr. Heaps' workshop, and generously supplied books and other requisites for the school, and blinds and fittings for the use of the congregation worshipping in the place. A few friends in Manchester gave a stock of books for a new library, and thus the premises were made convenient and supplied with

every requisite. It would be impossible to over-estimate the influence of Mr Fishwick's family on the progress of Methodism in this district. By their wealth and social influence, and loyalty to the cause, they nourished Methodism in its days of weakness and obscurity, and they lived long enough to see it firmly rooted in the soil. Shortly after the opening of the Fleetwood Sunday School, a gracious revival cheered the hearts of the faithful few. The work marvellously grew and spread, till, in 1842, the Society was so prosperous that it could afford to pay its way and talk about extension. Mr. Heaps for the first time received a rent for his room, and regular preaching services were provided on the Garstang plan twice every Sunday. In 1846 the present Wesleyan chapel was built, and a resident minister appointed to the town.

Mrs. Cumpsty thus became the Apostle of Fleetwood. It is true Mrs. Ronson was there first, but she stayed only for a brief period. Mrs. Threlfall was also there at an early period, and rendered faithful and devoted service to the cause to the end of her days. But Mrs. Cumpsty is the central figure in the Church's history. She was a leader in the Society till the time of her death, in 1874, and her name is fragrant and her memory green to this day. She was a grand woman—noble-minded, self-denying, pure, and good.

Fylde Methodism has been peculiarly rich in devout and honourable women of this kind, and those who know it best will regret that it is now impossible to rescue their noble deeds from oblivion.





VIII.

WILLIAM THRELFALL,

THE MISSIONARY MARTYR OF NAMAQUALAND.

HOLLOWFORTH, near Woodplumpton, is one of the loveliest places in the Fylde. It is situated three or four miles to the north of the line of railway that runs from Preston to Kirkham, and is nearly equidistant from Preston, Kirkham, and Garstang. It is away from the main arteries of our national life, in a quiet, secluded spot, surrounded by fertile pastures and well-wooded fields.

The mansion at Hollowforth stands in its own grounds, and has an air of comfort and respectability about it that cannot fail to arrest the attention of a stranger. For generations it has been the home of the Threlfalls of Woodplumpton, and it has a history well worth recording.

The Threlfall family, so far back as they can be traced, were yeomen and small farmers in the Fylde. By diligence and self-denial, they gradually acquired wealth, and raised themselves to affluence and social position.

Richard Threlfall, the squire of Hollowforth nearly a century ago, had been a tanner and farmer in his earlier years, and having amassed considerable wealth, he retired from business, and lived the life of a country gentleman. He was a liberal-minded, well-educated Churchman in his earlier years, but through the influence of Roger Crane of

Preston he was induced to join the Methodists. He was a gentleman before his conversion, but the grace of God ennobled and enriched him, and made him a Christian gentleman in the very best sense of the term.

The mansion at Hollowforth became a centre of religious activity and Christian enterprise. It was the home of the Methodist preachers; and they found in Richard Threlfall a judicious and generous friend. He gave them wise counsel and timely help in their evangelistic work.

William Threlfall, the hero of our story, was born at Hollowforth, June 6th, 1799, and was the son of Richard Threlfall.

From his infancy he was surrounded with Christian influences and blessed with godly training and instruction.

His childhood and youth passed away peacefully with his intellectual pursuits. He read a great deal, and had the advantage of the best teachers, so that his natural abilities were cultivated and developed as became his position and prospects in life.

It was not till he was sixteen years of age that he yielded to the spiritual influences that surrounded him. He seems to have been a devoted student, fully occupied with his literary and scientific pursuits, and striving diligently to prepare his mind and heart for a career of honourable usefulness. He attended with his parents the Methodist preaching services at Woodplumpton, and one day heard a sermon on the parable of the Prodigal Son that arrested his attention and led to his conversion.

At that time the Fylde Mission had commenced, and two Methodist preachers were stationed at Garstang—the Revs. Richard Allen and John Wilson. A band of zealous local preachers had joined them in preaching through all the villages and hamlets of the Fylde. It was while this new crusade was being prosecuted with such energy and success that William Threlfall was caught in the Gospel net. We have no record as to the preacher, and probably he never knew what a prize he had caught. So far as we can judge,

some humble local preacher came and preached his sermon, and went his way unconscious of the good he had done.

“ Full many a shaft at random sent
Finds mark the archer little meant.”

But God winged that shaft, and carried it to William Threlfall's conscience. The memory of that sermon lingered with him for years, and unconsciously influenced his whole life.

His cultured mind saw the inimitable parable of the Prodigal Son pictured before his eyes and enforcing its lessons on his conscience. The picture of the father going out into the fields and straining his eyes looking for the returning prodigal, was a striking lesson of God's love for a lost and neglected world. It prompted him to return as a prodigal and confess his sin, and seek and find mercy. And when he was enabled fully to trust and then to triumph in God's great mercy, it prompted him to pity and pray for the prodigals who were still far from home and help and heaven.

He was converted in the year 1815, and at once he identified himself with the Methodists, and availed himself of all the means of grace. His piety was cheerful and ardent; religion was to him a joy and a pleasure.

He became a local preacher in 1817, when he was eighteen years of age, and in all his journeys through the Circuit he preached with great plainness and power.

His intellectual superiority, and his high social position, placed him intellectually and socially above the average preachers of the time, and having his name mentioned in contrast with the Threlfalls of Pilling and other places, he was known as “ Gentleman Threlfall ;” and yet his humility and modesty and piety endeared him to the hearts of the Fylde Methodists. His services were owned and blessed by God to the conversion of sinners, and he began to feel that he was called to preach the Gospel.

In every service he prayed for the heathen, and at the missionary meetings he expressed a strong desire to go abroad and preach Christ in a foreign land. He had read a great

deal about the island of Madagascar, and his soul had been thrilled by the heroic labour and dauntless courage of the agents of the London Missionary Society.

Though he was born to wealth and social position, and had such fair and auspicious prospects in life, he was willing to give up all his position and prospects for Christ's sake. He would willingly sacrifice his title to the estate at Hollowforth, if he might give his life for the glory of God and the salvation of his fellow-men. It seemed to him the noblest, grandest use to make of his life, to toil and suffer and die for the perishing heathen. He talked about it, he prayed about it, he consulted his parents and friends about it, and finally he resolved that he would give up home and ease and social influence, and devote his life and fortune to the foreign mission field.

This was no boyish whim, born of enthusiasm and a love of adventure. It was a settled conviction of duty that nothing could move. He writes in his journal, July 22, 1820: "I think I can lay down my life for the salvation of the pagan world. When I hear of the sufferings of missionaries, my inclination to go is sharpened more than when I hear of their comfort and prosperity; the greater the danger the more ardent is my desire, and I feel as if I should be gratified in laying down my life for Christ's sake. I am willing to go to the farthest, the most pagan, and the most sickly place, where a missionary of Christ never stood; or to fill up the place of one who has fallen a victim to the climate or his own incessant labours. I have thought seriously on the subject for upwards of three years, and for anything I know, have looked on it on every side, and in all its aspects, over and over again. From a conviction of duty, and the terrible consequences of the neglect of that duty, I offered myself to the Missionary Committee, and still offer myself, and shall cheerfully submit to their plans and wise measures. O Lord, bless and direct them and me. Amen."

He was accepted by the Wesleyan Missionary Society, and appointed to South Africa. He sailed from London

December 10th, 1821, but was detained by bad weather at Ramsgate till January 5th, 1822. After a four months' voyage he landed at Cape Town, April 4th, 1822. He spent some months in Caffreland riding from kraal to kraal, and visiting the European settlers, in the true missionary spirit. Once he was lost in the bush, and spent a miserable night up a tree to escape the wild beasts. His only food was an orange and a few apples, and he was literally drenched with rain. On another occasion the lions attacked him, and devoured two of his horses and an ox. Often he had to ford or swim rivers at the risk of his life, and repeatedly he was in danger of death by starvation. Yet, in writing home to his brothers and sisters, who were living in luxury and comfort in the Fylde, he says:—

“I cannot tell how near I feel to God and heaven; and yet I do not wish to die, but rather to live until others, better qualified than myself, and with fewer infirmities, arrive as Christian missionaries to enlighten the dark minds of the heathen by whom I am surrounded. Here are tens of thousands who never heard of a Saviour. My very soul yearns for them. Had I but the language of the people, I would fly as on the wings of the wind from village to village, and from kingdom to kingdom, and consider myself

‘Happy if with my latest breath
I might but gasp His name,
Preach Him to all, and cry in death,
“Behold, behold the Lamb!”’”

In June, 1823, H.M.S. “*Lieven*” sailed from Cape Town on a surveying expedition to the east coast of Africa and the west coast of Madagascar. Her commander, Captain Owen, had orders to take soundings in the Mozambique Channel, and report all the results of his investigations for the information of the Home Government. Mr. Threlfall was offered a free passage by the frigate as far as Delagoa Bay, and an introduction to the chiefs on the coast. On his arrival, on July 22nd, he found the place extremely unhealthy to

Europeans. The malaria arising from the marshes and stagnant pools had previously carried off a party of European settlers, and two emigrant ships that found their way to this fever-trap buried or threw overboard one hundred and fifty bodies in a few days. The "Lieven" had sailed away and left him, so there was no escape. He lived in a hut by himself, cooked his own food, washed his own linen, and did his utmost to evangelise and instruct the natives around him. Soon the climate began to tell on his vigorous constitution. Repeated attacks of fever and dysentery so weakened him that he was utterly prostrate, and desired to return to Cape Town for medical advice and treatment.

In February, 1824, the "Nereid," a South Sea whaler, put into Delagoa Bay for fresh water and vegetables. The captain took Mr. Threlfall on board, and promised to land him at Cape Town. They had no sooner left the port than the fever and dysentery broke out among the crew, and several of them died. The rest were so weakened by illness that they were unable to navigate the ship. She drifted before the wind a floating coffin, the dead lying in their bunks unburied, and the living prostrate and helpless. The men at the signal station near Cape Town watched the vagaries of the strange vessel for several hours, and signalled to her, but met with no response. As she was every moment drifting nearer the rocks to her own destruction, they sent a crew to her assistance. They boarded her, and brought her to anchor in the bay, and sent the following notice to Lloyd's:—"Ship 'Nereid,' South Sea whaler, arrived in Table Bay, in distress. Twenty days at sea, from Delagoa Bay; called there for water; caught the fever; took the Rev. W. Threlfall on board, sick. All hands down. Ship unmanageable; lost fifteen hands on the passage, among whom are the first and third mates. The captain is delirious, and the reverend gentleman dying. Seen at sea in distress, and brought into port."

Mr. Threlfall contrived to send ashore the following brief note, addressed to "Whoever might be at the Mission":—

“DEAR BRETHREN AND SISTERS,—Here I am, in the midst of death, and in dying circumstances; but happy in God, and going to glory. Farewell. Let us meet in heaven.

W. T.”

On receipt of this message, the Rev. James Whitworth went on board, with two native boys, to cleanse and disinfect the ship, and nurse the sick during thirty days’ quarantine. The plague was stayed, and at the end of a month all the sufferers were convalescent.

The two native boys who so bravely assisted Mr. Whitworth to disinfect the ship had been rescued from slavery by Mr. Threlfall, and were registered as freemen in the colony. They were afterwards placed by him in an English school, and educated at his expense, to qualify them as interpreters and assistants to the Mission. One of these youths embraced Christianity, and was baptized under the name of Ransom Threlfall.

During his illness at Cape Town, Mr. Threlfall caused a letter to be written to his father in the Fylde, entreating him to set apart that portion of his property which he intended for him—first, for the education of his two African boys, to prepare them as assistants and interpreters to the Mission; and the remainder to the Wesleyan Missionary Society. This request was at once granted, and his father regularly paid for the maintenance of the youths, and paid the balance to the Missionary Society, when tidings came of his son’s death.

In October, 1824, William Threlfall removed by waggon to Little Namaqualand, to recruit his health in a more bracing climate, and to renew his beloved missionary labours. He nursed the sick, instructed the ignorant, and helped the helpless. As his health improved, he consecrated himself afresh to the mission work, and wrote to his friends cheerful letters about his position and prospects.

About the end of June 1825, he started on a missionary journey to the Fish River in company with Jacob Links and

Johannes Jager, two native teachers. He intended to visit the various tribes in Great Namaqualand, teaching and preaching, and if favourably received, he would return by the 1st of October to consult with his brethren about the establishment of a permanent mission station on the Fish River. The country was very unsettled, the people were hostile, and they were often unable to buy food. Still these three Christian heroes struggled on till the middle of August, and sent cheery messages back, expressing their unshaken trust in God, and their undying love for His cause.

On leaving Kamanoup, they hired a guide named Naugaap, who conspired with five Bushmen to plunder and murder the whole party. Accordingly the guide led them to the kraal of one of the Bushmen, and assured them of their safety. In the middle of the night Naugaap and his party quietly surrounded the two native teachers, and discharged a shower of arrows and stones at them. Jager was killed outright, and Links had his back broken. Mr. Threlfall, hearing the noise, rose, and asked what was the matter. The cover was snatched from his body, and an attempt was made to murder him. He then fled to a thorn bush, where he was wounded by a Bushman, but returned to his baggage. The guide followed him there and found him on his knees praying. He struck the missionary a blow on the forehead with a stone that stunned him, and the Bushmen completed the tragedy by piercing him through the heart with an assegai. They then stabbed Jacob Links in the same manner, and stole their clothes, baggage, and cattle.

The friendly tribes scoured the country in all directions till they captured the treacherous guide, and handed him over to the civil authorities. He was tried, found guilty, and shot for the murder of Mr. Threlfall and his assistants.

The sad news was carried to the Methodist home in the Fylde, and though it brought sorrow to the family, they sorrowed not as those without hope. They rejoiced that their son and brother was counted worthy to labour and suffer in the Master's service.

If Fylde Methodism had never produced one single convert beside the noble young hero whose bones lie buried in South Africa, it would have done enough to immortalise itself. Self-denying, holy Christian men like William Threlfall, are fruits of the Spirit, of which any Church and any age may well be proud. The story of his heroism was told through the land more than half a century ago, and prompted Montgomery to immortalise it in song :—

“ Not by the lion’s paw, the serpent’s tooth,
By sudden sunstroke, or by slow decay,
War, famine, plague—meek messenger of truth !
Wert thou arrested on thy pilgrim way.

The sultry whirlwind spared thee in its wrath,
The lightning flashed before thee, and passed by ;
The brooding earthquake paused beneath thy path,
The mountain torrent shunned thee, or ran dry.

Thy march was through the savage wilderness ;
Thine errand thither, like thy gracious Lord’s,
To seek and save the lost, to heal and bless
Its blind and lame, diseased and dying hordes.

How did the love of Christ that, like a chain,
Drew Christ Himself to Bethlehem from His throne,
And bound Him to the cross, thine heart constrain,
Thy willing heart, to make thy true love known !

But not to build, was thine appointed part,
Temple where never temple stood before ;
Yet was it well the thought was in thine heart,
Thou know’st it now, thy Lord required no more.

The wings of darkness round thy tent were spread,
The wild beasts howling brake not thy repose,
The silent stars were watching overhead,
Thy friends were nigh thee—nigh, too, were thy foes.

The sun went down upon thine evening prayer ;
He rose upon thy finished sacrifice :
The house of God, the gate of heaven, was there ;
Angels and fiends on thee had fixed their eyes.

At midnight, in a moment, open stood
The eternal doors to give thy spirit room ;
At morn the earth had drunk thy guiltless blood—
But where on earth may now be found thy tomb ?

At rest beneath the ever-shifting sand,
This thine unsculptured epitaph remain,
Till the last trump shall summon sea and land—
‘To me to live is Christ, to die is gain.’

And must with thee thy slain companions lie,
Unmourned, unsung, forgotten, where they fell ?
Oh for the spirit and power of prophecy,
Their life, their death, the fruits of both to tell !
They took the cross, they bore it, they lay down
Beneath it, woke, and found that cross their crown.

O'er their last relics, on the spot where guilt
Slew sleeping innocence, and hid the crime,
A Church of Christ amidst the desert built
May gather converts till the end of time ;
And there with them, their kindred, dust to dust,
Await the resurrection of the just.”





IX.

RICHARD MASON,

THE FIRST METHODIST IN PILLING.



HE tourist who wishes to escape from the din and bustle of busy life should cross the Wyre by the ferry at Fleetwood, and walk four or five miles in the direction of Lancaster. He will soon find himself in a veritable "sleepy hollow," and may enjoy the pleasures of solitude among the fields and lanes of Pilling to his heart's content.

Pilling is a scattered, straggling village, extending three or four miles along the low flat shores of Morecambe Bay, and stretching inland two or three miles from the sea. Its detached farmhouses and cottages suggest the idea that some old vikings must have wrecked and lost their ship on its sand-bound coast ages ago, and settled and reclaimed the land from its ancient marsh and bog. It seems as if each settler had just reclaimed sufficient bog to eke out a subsistence for himself, and had built himself a cottage and homestead. So it came to pass that almost every house had a field to itself in the olden time, and if any of its inhabitants were anxious to quarrel with a neighbour, they would have to go a long way to find him. Its two most distant houses are seven miles apart.

The village has an air of comfort and respectability about it that cannot fail to strike a stranger. Immense turf-stacks

indicate that an inexhaustible supply of fuel can be had for the labour of cutting and drying; while the heaps of potatoes on every hand, and the huge barns and wheat-stacks, prove the fertility of the soil, and the providence of the people.

And yet this quiet, sleepy place, must have pulsed with life many centuries ago. The Roman road through the Fylde, and the etymology of many names of places, clearly prove that the Romans had a camp or station on the coast, through which Rome's legions had access to all parts of the country. And it is pretty certain that both Roman and Saxon adventurers sailed their tiny ships into Lune deeps, and found their way up the Lune, and Wyre, and Ribble, in those early times.

But modern progress has left Pilling solitary and lonely. The shipping has deserted the Lune, and found its way to Liverpool and Barrow. The great lines of railway have passed it by, and have left it to the tender mercies of a branch line known to fame as the Garstang and Knot End Railway. It is still a highway for all the tramps and vagrants who honour Blackpool with their presence during the season. It is in a direct line from Fleetwood to Lancaster, and the parasites of our social life are glad to lodge a night under its friendly barns and hay-stacks.

Years ago, it was famous as the home of the sea-gulls. These wild, free wanderers had a partiality for its solitary marshes and lonely bogs, and thousands of them frequented the village during the breeding season; but enterprising tourists invaded their nursery, and interfered with their domestic arrangements, so they took themselves away to Walney Island and other lonely places, where they might rear their young in peace.

Let not the reader imagine that the inhabitants of Pilling are dull and sleepy in intellectual matters. They are great readers and active thinkers, and though they are stowed away in a quiet corner of the land, they always contrive to know what is going on in the great world outside. No

great social, political, or religious movement can make its appearance in the land, but Pilling will take care to hear of it, and to know something about it.

At the beginning of the present century, Pilling had an evil name in religious matters. Its clergyman at that time was the Rev. Mr. Potter, a kind-hearted, well-meaning man, who was a slave to intemperance. Though he was well-educated, comparatively wealthy, and of good social position, he never could keep himself out of disgrace and trouble. He went to Preston Guild for a week, but had to come home in disgrace in a day or two. He got drunk and rolled under the bed, and it required the help of three or four servants to drag him from under the old-fashioned four-poster. He was so ashamed of himself that he hurried away to Pilling early next morning. In his sober moods he was kindly and courteous and generous, but when he was under the influence of drink, he was quarrelsome, pugnacious, and utterly reckless. He has often preached in Pilling Church on a Sunday with a pair of black eyes and a bruised face, the marks of some pothouse brawl and quarrel in which he had been engaged. When his parishioners remonstrated with him, and told him he ought to set a better example, he used to say: "You should do as I say, and not as I do."

There lived in Pilling at that time a young shoemaker named Richard Mason, who was a great reader, and a diligent seeker after truth. He was born in Pilling, in 1780, and when he was about thirty years of age he married and settled in business in his native village. Some time during the year 1810 he had been reading Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted*, and the Holy Spirit had made a powerful impression on his mind through the perusal of that book. His convictions for sin were deep and powerful, and he knew not where to look for comfort. Filled with anguish and remorse, he went, a poor, broken-hearted penitent, to the Vicarage, and stated his case to Mr. Potter. With great earnestness and sincerity he inquired, "Sir, what must I do to be saved?"

Mr. Potter tried to soothe his troubled spirit, and told him not to despair, for he was a very worthy man, and he must work out his salvation with fear and trembling. Richard Mason went away from the Vicarage burdened as he came. As he walked home he was thinking aloud and talking to himself: "A worthy man!—a worthy man!" he cried, in anguish. "I'm worthy of hell—I feel I'm worthy of hell." "Not despair!—not despair!" he groaned again; "I feel I must despair of ever seeing the Lord's face in my present condition."

"Work out my salvation with fear and trembling," he said. "I do fear, and tremble, too; but that brings me no relief."

He had read and thought a good deal about the new birth, and he now asked Mr. Potter to preach a sermon on that subject on the following Sunday.

The Vicar, with his usual impulsiveness, said, "I will, Richard, I will; and it shall be a good one."

Sunday after Sunday did Richard go to Pilling Church, expecting the promised sermon, but it never came.

Meanwhile the burden of his spirit became intolerable. In despair he went to other places, seeking light and guidance.

He walked to Garstang to attend a Wesleyan service in a room over Stoop Hall. The Rev. Joseph Hollingworth, of Lancaster, was the preacher, and his text was, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom. i. 16). This sermon only served to increase his distress and anguish. He saw that salvation was within his reach, but he had not yet obtained it. He was still seeking.

The following Sunday morning he and his brother walked to Forton Chapel, intending to hear the Congregational minister; but the chapel was closed, and there was no service that day. They hurried forward to Cockerham Church, but the clergyman had nothing better for them than a political sermon, in which he denounced the French. But Richard

cared nothing about Napoleon or French politics. He had serious business nearer home. He was ready to cry out in despair, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?"

Next day while he was at work in his garden, and crying mightily with tears and groans for mercy, his prayers were heard, and deliverance came. His sense of pardon was clear and distinct and precious, and for some weeks he seemed to live in a new world, and breathe a spiritual atmosphere. It had been a long and painful conflict, lasting about twelve months; and if he had only had some experienced teacher, he would have been saved many months of anguish and sorrow.

But the same difficulties beset his path once more. He was alone and friendless in this spiritual conflict; he had no friend or adviser, and he soon lost the light and joy he had found, and relapsed into dense darkness again.

It was a terrible trial, and for weeks he mourned and wept, and sought in vain to recover the lost blessing.

One Sunday morning, in the autumn of 1811, he rose about four o'clock, resolved to seek till he found a sense of the favour of God. He breakfasted early, and walked from his home at Pilling to Preston, a distance of sixteen miles. He heard a Methodist sermon in the morning, and in the afternoon attended a Methodist love-feast. The experiences there related showed him that other people had been in darkness and blindness before him, but they had accepted the Master's gracious invitation, and had come to Him for light. In the evening he left Preston on his journey home with the gracious words ringing in his ears, "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Long before he reached home the sun had gone down, and the stars glittered in the sky, but Richard Mason heeded them not. His monotonous footsteps disturbed the wild birds, and caused the curlews to fly screaming round his head, but he heard them not. His mind was

fully occupied with the great and pressing problem, "What must I do to be saved?"

He knelt among the turf on Pilling Moss, far away from any human dwelling, and there and then recovered his lost peace and joy. He went home rejoicing, and told his wife the good news. In a few days she became partner with him of like precious faith. They told their neighbours and friends about it, and soon a little Society was formed.

The first class-meeting met in Richard Mason's house in December, 1811. It consisted of eleven members. Peter Parr was the leader. The other members were Richard Mason and Hannah, his wife; George M'Neal and Agnes, his wife; James M'Neal, Robert Hayes, Jenny Cornall, and one other whose name I have not yet been able to rescue from oblivion.

Preaching services were held in cottages, and farmers' kitchens, and barns, and by the wayside, and in the fields, for the next two years, till a chapel was built, in 1813. The erection of this chapel was a great undertaking for the infant Church, but they set about it with a determination to succeed. Those who could not give money gave willing service in carting sand, stone, timber, and building materials with their own carts and horses. Others again gave stone and timber and labour for the good of the cause. The people had a mind to work; and when the plain white-washed chapel was erected, and opened for public worship, the service was as sincere, and doubtless as acceptable, in the sight of Heaven, as though there had been a lofty spire and stained windows and Gothic roof. For more than seventy years has that plain Methodist chapel ministered to the spiritual needs of the succeeding generations of worshippers at Pilling, and I never look at it without a feeling of reverence and respect for the self-denying men and women who reared it.

It was not long before the Methodist hive at Pilling had to "swarm," for Richard Mason's house became too small to hold them all. A new class was formed, which met at the

chapel, under the leadership of George M'Neal. Richard Mason became leader of the original class that met in his house about the year 1820, and he held that office for nearly forty years. He was also superintendent of the Sunday school, and prayer leader, for many years.

As an example of his earnest desire to know Methodist doctrines thoroughly and fully, it is said that no famous preacher ever came into the neighbourhood but he took an opportunity of hearing him. The popular preachers in his day used to preach an hour or more, and take some pains to expound and illustrate the leading features of Methodist theology. And they never had a more eager and attentive listener than Richard Mason. He once walked from Pilling through St. Michael's-on-Wyre, Preston, and Ormskirk, to Liverpool, to hear Dr. Adam Clarke preach. After the services he cheerfully walked home again to Pilling—a distance of at least fifty miles for each journey. The man who would cheerfully walk a hundred miles to hear a sermon and find food for his hungry soul, was surely a man who deserved to be fed, and it is to be hoped that Dr. Adam Clarke preached two of his best sermons that day.

The Society at Pilling grew and flourished till it became one of the most active and vigorous portions of the Garstang Circuit. It had the honour of rearing and sending into the ministry the Rev. T. T. Lambert, and he has reason to be proud of the godly men and women who won him to Christ, and enlisted him in the Master's service.

All the pioneers of Methodism have long since passed away to their reward. A few of their descendants still live to relate the story of their self-sacrifice and devotion to the cause.

I have gathered many of the facts in this paper from an old and faded bit of paper that was read at Richard Mason's funeral sermon more than a quarter of a century ago, and is prized and treasured by his daughter to this day.

His wife, Hannah Mason, lived to a good old age, and it had long been her prayer that she might not taste the pains of death. It was her wish that she might—

"Her body with her charge lay down,
And cease at once to work and live."

Her desire was literally granted. She passed away in a moment from her domestic duties, and when apparently in her usual health, to her home in heaven. She had just finished baking and cleaning up the kitchen, when she sat down, as they thought, to rest. The chariot had come, and she had entered into rest. She was interred at Pilling Church in 1855.

Three years later the summons came for Richard Mason. For years he had been gradually ripening for heaven. He suffered much, but he endured his pain with great resignation and patience. As he lay waiting for the end, he repeated the lines:—

"Jesus, my all in all Thou art,
Strength of my failing flesh and heart.
Oh, could I catch a smile from Thee,
And drop into eternity!"

He had not strength to repeat them again. He faintly articulated, "Jesus!" and that was the last word he uttered. He was not, for God took him. His death occurred July 23rd, 1858, aged seventy-eight years.

The Methodists of Pilling have a history of which they never need be ashamed. Richard Mason and his comrades in toil have all reached the better land, and they bid those who are left behind to be "not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises."





X.

JAMES ROSKELL,

THE CONVERTED SOLDIER.



JAMES ROSKELL was born at a small farm "over Wyre," between Hambleton and Rawcliffe, about the year 1790. His parents gave him a tolerably good education, and a practical training in farming, in hopes that he would one day inherit their homestead and follow their occupation.

But he was born in stirring times, when the people were mad with the lust of conquest and the greed of empire. The "gunpowder and glory business" had turned men's heads, and diverted their thoughts from every other subject; and when James Roskell was a youth of sixteen or seventeen, he was smitten with the war fever.

My readers of to-day can scarcely realise the extent and power of the warlike spirit that cursed the nation at that time.

If a young man went to church on Sunday, he would hear a political sermon denouncing Buonaparte and the French, and appealing in the most impassioned terms to his manliness and patriotism. In one country church the clergyman is reported to have exclaimed in the middle of his sermon, "Down with him! down with him! that usurper of tranquillity and peace! He is the foe of God and man! Shame on the cowardly men who will not resist his designs!" It is said that one young farmer's son was so excited by this harangue

that he seized his hat and marched out of the church, vowing with fearful blasphemy that he would take his life. Three or four other young men followed his example, and enlisted next day. They filled a soldier's grave in the Peninsular campaign, and the clergymen who helped to squander the nation's blood and treasure, and saddle us with a national debt, thought they were doing God's work in the world.

If a young man went to the alehouse or the market place, he fared no better than at church. The most fearful stories were told of French atrocities, and threats were heard of an invasion of England that should bring devastation and ruin to our hearths and homes. Mothers frightened their children with horrible stories of Buonaparte, and weak and decrepit old men implored young men to go abroad and fight. Almost every family had contributed a son or a brother or a father to the war, and deeds of heroism were described, and stories of battles were told, that made boys wish they were young men, and old enough to share the dangers of a campaign.

Even the young women of the period spurned the addresses of young men who stayed at home to support a widowed mother or orphan brothers and sisters, and reserved all their favours for the sturdy young fellows who had pluck and spirit enough to fight the French.

James Roskell was not proof against these evil influences, so he accepted the king's shilling, and marched to Preston, with a bunch of ribbons streaming from his hat, to be transformed into a soldier. He found himself in the most disreputable company, for his comrades were the most loathsome reprobates that were ever swept together by a press-gang.

The recruiting sergeant might fitly have described them in the language of Falstaff:—"You would think that I had a hundred and fifty tattered prodigals lately come from swine-keeping, from eating draff and husks. A mad fellow met me on the way, and told me I had unloaded all the gibbets and pressed the dead bodies. No eye hath seen such scarecrows; I will not march through Coventry with them, that's flat.

"Nay, and the villains march wide betwixt the legs, as if

they had fetters on ; for indeed I had the most of them out of prison. There's but a shirt and a half in all my company ; and the half shirt is two napkins tacked together, and thrown over the shoulders like a herald's coat without sleeves ; and the shirt, to say the truth, stolen from my host at St. Alban's, or the red-nosed innkeeper of Daventry. But that's all one ; they'll find linen enough on every hedge. But they are good enough to lose—food for powder—they'll fill a pit as well as better men."

James Roskell soon saw beneath the gloss and tinsel of war, and felt its terrible reality. At that time Wellington was intrenched behind the lines of Torres Vedras, and the French were vainly trying to dislodge him. The demand for reinforcements was so great that when volunteers failed, young men were run down and kidnapped by the press-gangs, and carried away to Spain. When these failed to fill the ranks, the authorities allowed felons, thieves, and murderers, from the prisons and hulks, to volunteer for foreign service. So that Falstaff's description of his pressed men is but a slight exaggeration of the state of things at the beginning of this century.

Their physical condition was bad enough, but their moral condition was worse. They were lamentably ignorant, and fearfully depraved. The ship that carried them across the Bay of Biscay to Lisbon was a floating hell. The sights and sounds that James Roskell had to bear from these drunkards, gamblers, thieves, and murderers, were more than tongue or pen may fitly describe.

It was a relief to him to be marched to the front and see something of active service. By the time he reached Torres Vedras, the French had abandoned the siege, and were in full retreat. He was ordered to advance in light marching order to harass and defeat the retreating French, who had carried off or destroyed all supplies on their line of march. The troops were almost starved to death, as it was impossible for their baggage and supplies to keep pace with them. For six weeks at a time they never took off their clothes, but

slept on the bare ground, in the rain and cold, without blanket or coverlet. At Salamanca, Talavera, and Badajos, where the French made a determined stand and fought, the convoy of supplies overtook them, and they were well fed.

It was in one of these engagements that James Roskell received an ugly bayonet wound in his cheek, that left its mark upon him to his dying day. It is believed that he killed his antagonist to save his own life, though in later years he would not talk about it.

When peace was declared, his regiment was quartered at Clonmel in Ireland, and he had an opportunity of seeing a little of a soldier's life in times of peace, before his term of service expired. He felt keenly his position in the regiment, with so many felons and thieves, who were only restrained by being tied up to the triangle and flogged. He was compelled to eat, and sleep, and live in the same room with them, and listen to their vile and filthy conversation. He must either join them in their folly and sin, or receive their insults and persecution. He often wondered what would become of him when he left the army. Would he go out of the ranks with a good name and a clear conscience? Or would he go to a felon's cell or the hulks?

Fortunately for him, there were a few godly Methodists in Clonmel who cared for the soldiers. They invited Roskell and ten or a dozen of his friends to class-meeting and prayer-meeting, and while the bulk of the soldiers were gambling, drinking, and quarrelling in the canteen, these young fellows were listening to stories of spiritual conflicts and victories that touched their hearts and quickened their consciences.

It was not long before these thoughtful young soldiers were converted, and James Roskell, by his superior intelligence and ability, became their recognised leader. They created a sensation in the barracks by taking possession of a room to which they considered themselves entitled, and meeting regularly to sing, and read, and pray, and help each other in the way to heaven.

Their title to the room was disputed by the roughs, and

they were subjected to coarse insults and brutal persecution. But they were soldiers every inch, and prepared to defend their rights. They said they had as much right to sing, and read, and pray, as their comrades had to gamble, and drink, and fight. They caused it to be known that if any comrade wished to join them in worship he would be heartily welcome, so long as he behaved himself; but if he attempted to interfere with their comfort, he would be either dropped out of the window or thrust out of the door.

Two or three serious disturbances occurred before the commanding officer interfered to protect their rights and privileges.

From that time they were permitted to worship in peace. They bought a pocket Bible each, and became diligent students of the Word of God.

James Roskell's pocket Bible is still preserved in Blackpool. It is printed in old-fashioned type, on coarse, strong paper, and strongly bound in leather. He covered it by stitching a piece of black cloth over it, and though the cloth is moth-eaten and falling to pieces with age, I regarded the book with interest. He carried it hundreds of miles in his knapsack, and found in its truths the guidance, and comfort, and nourishment his soul required.

After his discharge from the army, he returned to the Fylde and settled at his native place. He was the only Methodist in the neighbourhood; but he was one of those intensely spiritual men who act on their neighbours like bar-magnets on steel filings. Put them where you will, they will soon find their affinities and attract them.

Across the Wyre from Hambleton, Moses Holden had formed a little Society at Thornton. They were as sheep without a shepherd. James Roskell cast in his lot among them, and soon became their leader. Every Sunday morning he crossed the ferry with his dinner in his pocket to spend the day in holy toil at Thornton. He met the class in the morning and conducted a prayer-meeting in the afternoon, reaching home again by "milking-time."

One Sunday John Bleasdale went with him to the ferry,

and while they were whistling and shouting to attract the ferryman's attention, a smart shower of rain drove them into a hovel for shelter. They had been talking about the work of God, and planning means for its extension.

"I'll tell thee what, John," said Roskell, "it seems a pity to bring me over Wyre every Sunday to lead Thornton class when there is so much to be done my own side the river. There's a Society at Garstang and one at Pilling, but there's ten or a dozen villages without a Society or member."

"We cannot spare thee, James, yet at Thornton," was Bleasdale's reply.

"Well, but the Lord has laid it on my conscience to work for Rawcliffe, and if thou'll promise me to pray about it, I shall be satisfied," said Roskell.

They did pray about it; and John Bleasdale became the leader at Thornton, to set James Roskell free to work in his own village.

He opened his house as a Sunday school at Rawcliffe, and gathered in as many young people as it would hold. He taught them to read and pray after his own fashion, and several of them were converted.

I am sorry I am not free to speak now about the results of this work. Some of the parties interested are still living, and widely known; so, in deference to their feelings, I must keep back some interesting matters for the present.

James Roskell brought to Christ a number of young people who afterwards became devoted men and women. In some instances his converts rose to positions of wealth and influence, and rendered valuable services to the cause in other places. One of these gentlemen afterwards, with but little help from the friends, built a chapel at Rawcliffe. The old difficulty of securing a site was in the way. The squire would have no Methodism there; and, with one or two exceptions, he owned all the land in the parish.

It happened, however, that the friends found a piece of common land to which nobody had a title. It adjoined a field belonging to a farmer who had a long-standing quarrel

with the squire, and who had no love to Methodism. The friends believed they were within their rights in building on this common land; but when the foundations were laid, and the walls about a yard high, the squire sent his solicitor to claim the land, and order them to remove the building.

While they were deliberating what to do, the farmer who owned the bit of land adjoining appeared on the scene, and said—

“What? Has he ordered you to take your chapel away?”

“Yes,” said the builder.

“Well, throw your bricks o’er my hedge, and build it in my field, and let him touch you if he dare!” was the reply.

They took him at his word, and secured the land, and the chapel stands there to this day.

But God had a greater work for James Roskell to do. In 1830, by a strange providence, he found it necessary to leave Rawcliffe, and settle at Little Layton, near Blackpool.

At that time Blackpool was quietly and steadily growing in importance as a health resort. Coaches ran regularly during the summer conveying visitors to Preston, and meeting the mail coaches from London to the north. A few wealthy visitors from Bolton and Manchester drove their own horses to Blackpool, and spent some weeks there during the bathing season.

Among these visitors were some wealthy Methodist families, who complained that no provision was made for their spiritual welfare beyond occasional services on the beach and in the open air, when they could find a preacher.

James Roskell greatly enjoyed the open-air services, but he was anxious to have a permanent Church and Society in Blackpool. Accordingly he made diligent inquiries among the residents for any spiritually-minded man who would join him in introducing Methodism to Blackpool.

He found a Preston Methodist in the town, named Robert Bird, a native of Ireland, who had a prosperous drapery business in Preston, and a branch establishment at Blackpool, in the buildings adjoining the Aquarium, and known to this day as Bird’s Cottages. At first, Mr. Bird only

attempted a season trade among the visitors, and at the end of each season he closed his shop, and returned to Preston for the winter. But his business prospered so much in Blackpool, that he opened a large room as a bazaar for the sale of drapery and fancy goods, and lived in the town all the year round. He was a generous, kind-hearted, liberal Methodist, and proved himself well fitted for the task of finding the infant Church a home, and nourishing and protecting its growth and development.

Robert Bird welcomed James Roskell as a brother in Christ, and entered heartily into his schemes for evangelistic work.

They sought and found a few neighbours and friends, and established a class meeting. Roskell was the leader, and Bird was his lieutenant. William Roskell, William Seed, Agnes Carr, William Irving, John Green, and a few pious women were among the first converts added to the little Society.

They met for worship in William Bonny's bathing-house, at the corner of Chapel Street and South Beach. This bathing-house was fitted with dressing-rooms, supplied with bathing costumes, and the usual conveniences that are now to be had from the attendants at bathing vans. Visitors used the house, as we now use the vans, and had only a narrow strip of sand to cross, where now the promenade is built, to dip in the sea, and return to Bonny's house to dress. The original building stood alone, but an additional wing was built on either side to form what is now Wylie's South Pier Hotel.

Here the class-meetings and prayer-meetings were regularly held, and occasionally a sermon would be preached, if they were only fortunate enough to lay hands on a preacher.

At a local preachers' meeting held at Garstang, September 24, 1832, it was resolved "that Blackpool shall be tried once a month as a preaching place, services to be held at six o'clock on Sunday evening." The supply of preachers was exceedingly limited and precarious, but Messrs. Roskell and Bird made the best arrangements they could. Many of the Preston local preachers and temperance advocates gave

willing help to the infant Church, and the names of Livesey, Sinkinson, Gregson, Teare, Bradley, Howarth, and Anderton the poet, are among that honoured band of workers.

Mr. Richard Seed of Poulton rendered valuable service in conveying the preachers with his horse and trap. He is said to have driven ministers to Blackpool to preach, and carried a duster in his pocket to make the chairs and benches tidy, and also a packet of candles to light the room. He and his wife were among the converts at the great revival at Poulton, and they retained their loyalty to Christ as long as they lived. Once, when driving a preacher to Garstang, his horse fell, and he was thrown violently into the road. He sprang to his feet, and rested the whole weight of his body upon one leg, which proved to have been badly broken. The broken bone tore the muscles and flesh so fearfully that the leg had to be amputated below the knee, and he was lame for the rest of his days.

When Bonny's bathing-house became too small to hold the infant Church, Robert Bird offered the use of a large room in his bazaar, and there services were held till 1835, when a small chapel and school-room were built in Adelaide Street, on the site of the present chapel and school.

The new premises were promptly occupied and wisely used. A Sunday-school was established, of which Mr. Bird was superintendent; and afterwards, through the intolerance of the Vicar of St. John's at Blackpool, a flourishing day-school was established.

James Roskell was an efficient class leader and prayer leader, though he never became a local preacher. He trained others to work, and guided and directed various evangelistic efforts in the neighbourhood.

To Roskell and Bird we are indebted, not merely for the establishment of Methodism at Blackpool, but also for its introduction to Blowing Sands and Marton. These two men of God toiled on through good and through evil report, denying themselves, and making sacrifices, that are at present far beyond our conception. How they toiled, and what they

gave to the cause, we shall never know, but their record is on high. They laboured, and we are entered into their labours.

In 1855, the field had been brought so far into cultivation, that a resident minister was appointed to the town, and Blackpool became the head of the Circuit.

Robert Bird died in great peace, and went to his reward.

James Roskell's work was nearly done. His iron constitution began to break up, and he retired to Fleetwood to end his days.

He lived alone in a humble cottage there. He never married; but throughout his long life he lived and laboured for others. In his later years, he had but a small income to keep him from starvation, but he always found somebody poorer than himself, and shared his mercies with them.

One day during his last illness, his old friend, John Bleasdale of Thornton, went to see him. He found him confined to bed on the ground floor of his cottage, with just a handful of fire and a scanty supply of food and fuel, for he had given all the rest away.

"Thou should not give everything away like this," said John, half reproachfully.

"It's all right, John," said the dying saint. "The Lord is good to me. My barrel of meal and my cruse of oil have never failed yet, and they never will."

"But thou gets imposed on, and lets folk run away with what thou needs," said Bleasdale.

"Never mind, John," he replied. "*I've just enough.* I'm going to headquarters to report myself, and I shall have rations enough to see the end of my journey."

So the old man died as he had lived—loyal to Christ, devoted to duty, faithful unto death. He sleeps in his humble grave at Fleetwood, without even a stone to mark his resting-place.

But when the King comes to distribute the honours and rewards to His faithful servants, He will say to James Roskell: "Well done, good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."



XI.

GEORGE FISHWICK OF SCORTON.



THE village of Scorton nestles at the foot of a range of hills, stretching from Preston to Lancaster, in the extreme north of the Fylde country.

It is remarkable for its peculiar position, as well as its history.

It stands on the main line of railway to the north, and in the highway of the world's bustle and activity. Long before railways were constructed, it intercepted the mail-coaches from London to Scotland, and kept abreast of the times in intelligence and enterprise. Unlike many of the hamlets and villages of the Fylde, it was not content to vegetate and exist, it must live, and leave its mark on the people of the district.

By its position, it also had important physical advantages. Far away to the eastward the hills rise bleak and bare, forming an elevated table-land that joins the Bolland forest, and reaches as far as Clitheroe and Settle. This vast tract of moorland is the birthplace of streamlets and rivers that feed the Ribble and the Wyre, and supply abundance of pure water to Blackpool and the Fylde.

From the slopes of its hills a pleasing panorama is spread before the tourist. Away to the north, and distant about ten miles, may be seen the grey towers of the castle and church at Lancaster, with the distant hills of the lake country in the background. Stretching away to the west,

the winding valley of the Wyre leads on to Fleetwood and the shores of Morecambe Bay, with Barrow and the Furness Fells in the distance, while to the south the well-wooded plains extend as far as the smoky suburbs of Proud Preston. Such a scene of mountain, river, forest, field, and sea would rejoice the heart of the poet and painter, and thrill the soul of every lover of Nature's beauties.

At the beginning of the present century a vast social revolution commenced in Lancashire that has marvellously increased the wealth of the people. Before that time the manufacture of cotton had been purely a domestic operation. The cotton was combed or carded, and spun, and woven by hand, with rude machinery, and after a very primitive fashion. The manufacturer supplied the raw material to one family, who combed or carded the cotton to draw out the fibre and prepare it for spinning. It was then taken to another man's house to be spun by hand and made into fine, threadlike yarn. It was afterwards taken to a third house to be woven into cloth.

It occurred to some genius that this was a sore waste of time and strength, and it was suggested that if a large room were built, where all these varied operations could be carried on at once, much economy of time and labour would be the result. It was further proposed to supply some better motive power than human hands and feet. Horse power, wind power, and water power were among the suggestions of that time, for steam power and electricity had not yet been developed.

To Scorton belongs the honour of attempting to solve this problem after a practical fashion, and the old cotton mill there was the first of its kind in Lancashire.

The mountain torrent was dammed up to form a lake; a small mill was built, and fitted with improved machinery worked by a water-wheel.

This mill provided employment for a considerable number of operatives who were attracted thither from the surrounding villages and hamlets.

The enterprising gentleman who suggested and built the Scorton Mill did not reap the benefit of his ingenuity and enterprise. He lost money by it, and the property fell into the hands of Mr. Fishwick, a wealthy currier at Burnley.

George Fishwick, the hero of my story, was born at Burnley, May 18, 1789; and, when he was twenty years of age, he commenced business in partnership with his brother Richard in the mill at Scorton.

He was a rigid Churchman, who regarded Methodism with contempt and dislike; and when application was made for permission to conduct services in one of his cottages, it was promptly and firmly refused.

About the year 1812, Richard Fishwick was seized with mortal illness, and returned to Burnley for domestic comfort and medical advice. Though he was a strict Churchman and a regular attendant at public services, he was a stranger to vital religion, and the prospect of death under such circumstances filled him with alarm and dismay. He began to inquire anxiously, "What must I do to be saved?" and so earnestly did he seek salvation that he was thankful for any teacher who could show him the way of peace. The Rev. James Needham, who was superintendent of the Burnley Circuit from 1812 to 1814, was instrumental in leading him to Christ; and his sisters Sarah and Ellen, who afterwards became Mrs. Hopwood and Mrs. Stead of Burnley, were also converted. These at once joined the Methodist Church, and their brother Richard died in great peace.

Before his death Richard wrote to Scorton, asking his brother George to reconsider his decision about permitting Methodist services in the village; and if the application was renewed, to entertain it courteously.

Meanwhile Jenny Cornall, one of the first Methodists in Pilling, had been compelled to migrate from Pilling to Scorton. She had a drunken, idle, worthless husband, and a large family of young children, and when she found it impossible to maintain them all, she obtained work for the children in the mill. She was a clever woman in many

respects. She had great knowledge and skill in the healing art, and her salves and ointments had a wide reputation. In treating broken bones and shattered limbs, she showed marvellous power for one so wanting in book learning and scientific training. So that with her children earning good wages in the mill, and her own earnings by the healing art, she was able to keep the wolf from the door.

She had also a wonderful gift of language. Though she was so illiterate that she could scarcely read her Bible, she had wonderful powers of speech. Before her conversion her tongue had been a powerful weapon for mischief, and after her conversion she used it for the glory of God, and for the good of souls.

She had not been long in Scorton before she had pointed a few sinners to Christ; and if they could not have preaching services, they could meet in her own house for praise and prayer.

But the roughs, fortified by Mr. George Fishwick's antipathy to Methodism, subjected Jenny and her companions to brutal and cruel persecution. One night, as the little company sat round the fire having a quiet fellowship meeting, they climbed on the roof and poured a bucket of water down the chimney, scalding the worshippers, and filling the cottage with soot and ashes. On another occasion they dropped a hen down the chimney, and as it descended, it beat its wings among the soot and set the chimney on fire, nearly suffocating both the hen and the Methodists.

But Jenny had learned a true Christian spirit, and she regarded it as a privilege to suffer for righteousness' sake. As her tormentors could not drive her out of her religion, they resolved to frighten her out of it; so one night the door was kicked open, and a rough young fellow leaped into the room bellowing like a bull. He was covered from head to foot in a bull's hide, with the horns on his head, and the tail trailing along the floor behind him. He danced about the floor, and cut his capers, but Jenny and her companions took no notice of him. They continued their spiritual con-

versation as if he were not in the room. At length he shouted, "What, are you not frightened at the devil?"

"No," said Jenny, "the devil cannot frighten us. Come and sit thee down, and we'll do thee good."

But the ghost knew better than expose himself to the railery of Jenny's tongue. He beat a hasty retreat, and could not be persuaded to encounter Jenny again.

After she had endured this persecution for some time, she complained to the Rev. John Wright, the minister at Garstang, about it, and suggested that another application should be made to Mr. Fishwick for permission to hold Methodist services. A formal request was written, and sent by the hand of a trusty messenger, who turned aside from the road and went into a field to pray for the success of his mission. To his great surprise and joy he was kindly received, and sent home with a favourable reply.

From that time Scorton was placed on the Garstang Circuit plan, and Methodist services were regularly held in the village.

Having granted permission for these services, Mr. Fishwick resolved to attend himself, and hear what sort of teaching would be given to his workpeople. The Word came with power, and he went home a humble, conscience-stricken penitent. His convictions of sin were deep and pungent, but he could not bring his mind to stoop so low as to become a Methodist. He would be outlawed from respectable society, and treated as an enemy of the Established Church, and a man of doubtful loyalty to the Crown. His position in society, and his rank among the gentry of the district, would be affected by such a surrender; so he sought salvation without making such a sacrifice. It was all in vain. His conscience troubled him. The Spirit pleaded with him. He found no rest or peace. At length he resolved to cast in his lot with the poor, persecuted, despised Methodists, and surrender all to Christ. He "chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." God honoured his decision

and self-denial, and he was soon rejoicing in a sense of forgiveness and peace.

From that day he became a new creature in Christ Jesus. He came boldly out in the Master's cause, and unflinchingly took his stand among those who esteemed "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt." He set up an altar for God in his house; and, whoever might be his visitors, the servants were called, the Scriptures were read, and prayer was offered morning and evening. By his zeal and discretion, his intelligence and devotion, he caused godliness to be respected among the men who had hitherto treated it with scorn and contempt.

He was appointed class-leader in the village, and soon his mature piety and wise and prudent counsels made him a tower of strength to the cause. Through his influence the National School was used as a preaching room, and a new Wesleyan day-school was established in Scorton.

He took the liveliest interest in everything that tended to promote the moral and spiritual welfare of his workpeople. He visited the sick, and reproved the wayward, and helped the weak, and relieved the poor, till he came to be regarded as the father and friend of his people.

In 1819 he married Miss Ann Eliza Crane, only child of Roger Crane of Preston. She was a cultured, amiable, pious Methodist, who inherited from her father a strong mind and keen perceptive faculties. She devoted herself entirely to the interest of her husband and his people, and soon gained a warm place in their esteem and affection. She had considerable medical and surgical skill, and these were unreservedly placed at the disposal of the poor and needy.

Methodism thus had a home in the Fylde that was respected and honoured. Mr. and Mrs. Fishwick were the friends of the Threlfalls of Hollowforth, the Cranes of Preston, and had access to all the best families in the district. The most famous preachers in the Connexion were entertained at Scorton, and every struggling cause turned to them for succour and help.

Garstang Chapel was built during the war fever, when money was scarce and materials were dear. The fleets that swept the seas scared peaceful merchant-ships into port, and prevented the import of timber, so that the price went up to a fabulous figure. The builders ran short of timber for the galleries, and left them unfinished, to the great amusement of their opponents. The property was heavily in debt when finished, but the liberality of Mr. Fishwick pulled them through their difficulties; and the old chapel has been replaced by a handsome new building and minister's house.

About two miles from Scorton was a poverty-stricken hamlet called Hollins Lane. It was the home of a tribe of rag-gatherers and hawkers, who, gipsy-fashion, travelled the Fylde, picking up sundry odds and ends and refuse. Their children were neglected and ignorant creatures, for whom nobody cared. Mr. Fishwick one summer went every Sunday afternoon to Hollins Lane, and gathered the children into the lane for instruction. He would stand in the middle of the lane, with the boys on one side and the girls on the other, telling them of Jesus and His love. When the cold weather came, and he could no longer meet them, he built a small preaching-room, and founded a small Society. The cause at Hollins Lane is still under the care of the minister of the Garstang Circuit. This school was built in 1822; and, as Mr. Fishwick could find no one to undertake the work, he went regularly every Sunday morning, with his dinner in his pocket, and toiled all day to lay the foundations of the little Society.

Mr. and Mrs. Fishwick had only one daughter and one son. The daughter, Mary, died on the 1st of December, 1838, at the age of eighteen. She was, like her mother and her grandfather, strong-minded, intellectual, and devout. She had but feeble health, though she was devotedly attached to the people of Scorton, and did her utmost to promote their welfare. Her own conversion is attributed to the labours of Mr. Richard Brash, a popular local preacher at that time.

Richard Brash was born near Garstang. His parents

were Independents, of the high Calvinistic type. When he was a youth of seventeen, James Smith, one of the young men converted at the great revival at Poulton, told him how God for Christ's sake had pardoned his sins, and made him happy in His love. Richard resolved there and then that if pardon and peace were to be had, he would not rest night or day till he found them. On the following Sunday night pardon came, overwhelming him with joy and gratitude. He found himself in bed the next morning, but could never remember how he got there.

His poor mother was greatly troubled that her orthodox son should have turned Methodist, and she tried hard to win him back to Calvinism. At the age of nineteen he became superintendent of the Garstang Sunday-school, and a leader in the Temperance movement about the time that Joseph Livesey signed the pledge in Preston. He also became a local preacher, though at first his utterance was too rapid and indistinct to be impressive. Having read that Demosthenes cured himself of defective speech, he filled his mouth with pebbles and went into the fields to speak aloud. He became a fluent and impressive speaker, and a most acceptable and successful preacher.

It was under his ministry that Miss Mary Fishwick was led to Christ, and she became a pious and devoted young lady.

Her early death was a great sorrow in the home at Scorton, but they sorrowed not as those without hope. They regarded it as a solemn warning to renewed consecration and devotion to the Master's service.

Had she lived till 1841, she would have attained her majority; but as she was called away to that land where they do not reckon time after our standards, her father resolved to celebrate her birthday by laying the foundation-stone of a new chapel. He obtained a plot of land from the Duke of Hamilton, and at his own expense he built a handsome chapel worthy of Scorton Methodism.

The watchful care and kindly attention he gave to the

welfare of his people in Scorton soon made it a model village. It had no public-houses. It had no police. It had efficient Sunday and day schools, with abundant provision for the intellectual and spiritual welfare of the people. Drunkenness and crime were almost unknown, and poverty and ignorance were seldom to be found in the neighbourhood.

In addition to his gifts and labours for Scorton, he gave willingly to promote the work of God everywhere. He was a generous subscriber to the Wesleyan Missionary Society and the Education Fund. He also generously helped the Home Missionary Fund, and gave freely to local claims. Almost every quarter day the Circuit funds would show a balance in debt, and he regularly challenged the brethren to subscribe one half of the deficiency, and he would give the other half to be rid of the debt.

The Lord prospered him in business. His mill found constant and profitable employment for the people of Scorton, and was a source of profit and competence to him. His only son, Crane Fishwick, had all the intellectual qualities that distinguished the Crane family, with their devout and reverent spirit; but, like his sister, he had feeble health, and lived the life of an invalid. Those who had the privilege of knowing him intimately speak of him with unbounded admiration and the warmest affection. He died at Waddow Lodge, near Clitheroe, February 9, 1866.

In 1849, Mrs. Fishwick, after enduring a long and painful illness with great Christian fortitude, died in full triumph of faith. It was a terrible blow to her husband, and a serious loss to the people of Scorton. She had endeared herself to the people by her earnest solicitude for their welfare and her anxiety to provide for the poor and needy.

After four years of widowhood, in which Mr. Fishwick's health and spirits suffered severely, he married, in the autumn of 1853, Elizabeth, daughter of Timothy France, Esq., of Preston, a lady with whom he and his family had long been on terms of intimate friendship. But his health had already suffered seriously, and he slowly but surely succumbed to

disease. He retained his old love for the Church and his former zeal for the Master's service during his long illness. The last letter he ever wrote was on Circuit business, addressed to a friend, and it concluded with these words: "*It is an honour to support Christ's cause. Do all the good you can, and do it now.*"

These solemn words of advice fitly express his own spirit of consecration to the Master's service. For nearly forty years he held the office of Circuit Steward in the Garstang Circuit. During the whole of that time Methodism had to contend with an intolerant spirit of opposition from the dominant Churches around it. Its own members were comparatively poor and often migratory. Debts, and difficulties, and discouragements had to be faced that sorely tried the faith and patience of the people. George Fishwick's name was a tower of strength, and his undaunted courage and quiet but aggressive energy fortified the faithful toilers in the Master's vineyard. No name in Fylde Methodism was more widely known or more deservedly esteemed.

As the shadow of death gathered about him he sent for his relatives and trusty friends to bid them farewell. He shook hands with each of them, giving them words of counsel and encouragement, and challenging them to meet him in heaven. As the end drew near, the watchers by his bed prayed not for life but for an easy and triumphant death. They had scarcely risen from their knees when, with a placid smile resting on his countenance, he resigned his spirit into the hands of his Redeemer.

Thus died George Fishwick, on the 19th of October, 1854, aged 65 years.





XII.

MRS. DOROTHY HINCKSMAN OF LYTHAM.



RS. DOROTHY HINCKSMAN was not a native of the Fylde country, but she rendered such valuable services to Fylde Methodism that she deserves a place among the foremost of the apostles. And the story of her introduction to Lytham is so extraordinary and romantic, that it deserves a permanent record.

She was born at the village of Cobridge, near Newcastle, in Staffordshire, August 17th, 1802. Her father was a master potter, employing a few workmen in a workshop adjoining his residence.

One day, when playing alone beside the garden gate, she mysteriously disappeared, and could not be found. She could not have run away, for she was but a child of three or four years old. Diligent search was made for her, but she had vanished and left no trace behind. Her mother was alarmed, and communicated her fears to the potters in the workshop. They organised a gang of searchers, and scoured the country round in search of the lost child.

At length somebody remembered that a gang of gipsies had passed the house in the morning, and the father and his workmen started in pursuit. They took the road to Newcastle, and after a long and exciting chase they overtook the gipsies just as they were entering the town. They overhauled their vans and carts, and, stowed away in a hamper

of straw, they found the lost child, with both hands filled with gingerbread. They were so overjoyed, that they bore her away in triumph without inflicting any punishment on the gipsies.

After this episode, the superstitious predicted for the child a stirring career.

Her parents belonged to the Church of England, and were careful to train up their children in the fear of God and in the strict observance of religious duties. They seem to have known little of the joy and freedom of God's service, for their religion was a hard, stern life of duty and servitude.

When she was fifteen years of age her mother died. During her last illness she had been ripening for heaven, and when the end came she passed away in the full triumph of faith. She prayed frequently for her children, and made her husband promise that they should have perfect freedom of choice in religious matters. She seemed to have a presentiment that they would not all cling to the Established Church as she had done, and she wished them to be free to go wherever they could find the best spiritual food and nourishment.

Her mother's death was a terrible blow to her. She felt she had lost her only counsellor and guide in spiritual matters. While she was in the depth of her sorrow, a friend invited her one Sunday evening to the Wesleyan Chapel at Burslem, to hear "the new preacher."

During the singing and prayer she was wonderfully interested; but when the preacher announced the text, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God," she was amazed and troubled. The preacher told her of sins which no one knew but herself, and so great was her sense of guilt that she was ashamed to lift up her eyes. She felt the burden of sin so greatly that she desired to see the preacher and state her case to him, for she said to herself, "Surely if he knew how to make me unhappy, he also knows how to make me happy."

Her father guarded her so jealously that she had few opportunities of meeting with the people of God, but she stole away to chapel whenever she could. On Sunday she attended a lovefeast, and heard from the testimonies given that other people had walked in darkness and been in sorrow for sin before her. So she felt encouraged to pray, and to believe that God would pardon her sin, and bless her with His smile and favour.

On the following Sunday she attended a class meeting, and received much spiritual light and comfort, with which she went away greatly encouraged.

During the following week she heard a sermon by the Rev. Charles Gloyne, on, "As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word," which gave her the help she needed. On her way home she was thinking over the words, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." "Well," she said, "but not for one so vile." Again the passage came to her mind: "*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*" "I am a sinner, therefore He came to *save me.*" In a moment light broke forth. She had joy unspeakable and full of glory, and her mouth was filled with praise. She sang with arms uplifted in the road, and made that dull November night as glad and bright as noonday. She sang all the way home, till her father declared she had gone mad through joining the Methodists.

Soon after her conversion she made the acquaintance of two pious young women, who afterwards became the wives of missionaries, and her intercourse with them proved a great blessing to her soul. She gradually gained knowledge and experience of spiritual things, till in about twelve months after her conversion she was enabled to give herself wholly to Christ, and experience the blessedness of perfect love.

From this moment she resolved to devote herself entirely and unreservedly to the Master's service. She loved the Lord with all her heart, and she would serve Him with all her strength. She visited the sick and the poor, relieving their necessities and praying with them. She distributed

tracts in the village, and became a collector for the Missions, and in the spirit of the Master "went about doing good."

But her father was bitterly opposed to Methodism. One evening in the month of November, 1822, he took her aside privately, and told her that she must make up her mind either to abandon Methodism or leave his house within half an hour. She must give up praying both in private and in public. She must not attend any more Methodist meetings, except once at chapel on Sunday out of respect to the promise he had made to his wife. She must neither visit the sick nor beg any more money for "those blacks." She must go with him twice to church on Sundays, and once to chapel. If she accepted these conditions, she should have all the comforts of home, and a share of his property with her brothers and sisters when he died.

But if she refused to comply with his terms, she must leave his house within half an hour, and be treated by the family as disgraced and disinherited.

She reminded him of his promise to her mother on her deathbed. She told what great things the Lord had done for her soul, and pleaded the risk and danger of following his counsels. But it was all in vain. He would have his own terms fulfilled to the letter, or she must go.

At length the brave girl said: "I cannot promise these things. I must save my soul."

The stern father's reply was: "Then you must go."

She at once began to pack her clothes and trinkets, and within half an hour she left her father's roof a pilgrim and a stranger.

Fortunately for her she was able to earn her own living. She was employed at a neighbouring china warehouse as a painter of china, so that she was independent of her father for maintenance.

She made her way through the dark muddy streets, carrying one parcel, while her father's servant girl carried another parcel. There was a poor widow who met in the same class, and she obtained lodgings with her for some time.

It was a terrible blow to be persecuted by her own father for righteousness' sake. It is only fair to the father to say that he had been incited to this unkind and unchristian conduct by the clergyman of the church he attended. The clergyman asked him why his youngest daughter had turned Methodist. He replied that he had done all he could to prevent it. But he was told that he would not have done his duty till he had compelled her to leave them.

Dorothy continued to visit the sick and poor, and to attend the means of grace, while she resided with the widow; but it was a great trial to pass her father's house, and be treated as an outcast and an alien.

Her father was subjected to reproach and remonstrance from his neighbours for his heartless and cruel conduct. Even those who cared nothing about religion spoke their minds freely to him when they had the opportunity, till he found that public opinion was against him, and he began to be ashamed of himself.

Dorothy had a serious illness that required her to consult a physician in Manchester, and on her return to the widow's house she was met by her sister and a servant who had been sent by her father to invite her home.

She accepted their invitation, and went home for a few months.

She was married at Burslem Church, October 22nd, 1824, to the Rev. Thomas Jones, a young Wesleyan minister about her own age. He is described as "a man of sterling worth, of great integrity, a bold and faithful expositor of Divine truth, and fully devoted to God." After proving his ministry by successful labour in three English Circuits, he was appointed as missionary to the island of Antigua in the West Indies.

Immediately after their marriage, Mr. and Mrs. Jones began to prepare for their voyage, and pay farewell visits to their friends. They sailed in the brig "Topaz," from Gravesend, December 21st, 1824; and, in spite of delays from contrary winds, they landed in Antigua, February 7th, 1825.

Mrs. Jones was charmed with the delightful scenery of the West Indies, and entered heartily into the labours of the mission field. She established a school, and taught some of the women and children to read, while her husband devoted himself to the public ministry of the Word.

The weeks and months flew by during their labours among the negroes of Antigua, till they had been a year on the island, when they were summoned to the district meeting at St. Christopher's.

Mrs. Jones accompanied her husband, and greatly enjoyed the services and reunion of fellow-workers at the district meeting.

On their return they encountered bad weather, and were forced to shelter at Montserrat, where they spent Sunday, February 26th, 1826. It was a most anxious time for the missionaries, as they were obliged to neglect their duties, and waste their time, through strong gales and head-winds. After much prayer and deliberation, they decided to leave their own vessel with their luggage, and try to reach Antigua by the mail-boat "Maria." She had a reputation for making quick passages, and as she was sailing on Monday, February 27th, the whole missionary party took passage in her. These were the Revs. William White, Thomas Truscott, Daniel Hillier, William Oke, and Thomas Jones, with Mrs. White and three children, Mrs. Truscott and one child, Mrs. Jones, and two nurses. The wind rose very high in the night, and on Tuesday morning Antigua was in sight; but there was a fearful sea, and the wind was right ahead. While they were yet in their berths, the vessel struck violently on the reef, and turned upon her beam ends, with the sea breaking over them, and washing down into the cabin. Their only boat was washed away with the mate and a negro, who were picked up at sea. The captain cut away the mast and rigging, but the fury of the sea broke up the vessel, and those sailors and passengers who were holding on by the bulwarks on the quarter-deck were drowned, as that portion of the boat heeled off the reef and sank in deep water. Mrs.

Jones would have gone down with them, but her feet were entangled in the rigging that still remained on the reef. The water was frequently up to her neck, and the wreckage floating past tore her clothing to shreds, and bruised and wounded her body. The captain contrived to drag her forward, and fix her near the bowsprit, as he felt sure that would last longest.

She was benumbed with cold, but he brought her an old jacket, and did his best to protect her from the wind and sea. The dead bodies of those who had been drowned when the ship broke up were floating around them, often within reach of them. During the day they could see land, not more than three miles distant, but they could not attract the attention of the people. Vessels came so near them that they could distinguish the sailors on board, but passed them by without observing their danger.

The Rev. Daniel Hillier made a gallant attempt to swim ashore to make known their condition. He struck out bravely, but finding the current too strong, he returned towards the wreck, but failed to reach it. He was drowned before their eyes, and they were powerless to help him.

All through the weary hours of Tuesday night, and Wednesday, and Wednesday night, they were looking and longing to be rescued. On Thursday, March 2nd, a schooner hove in sight, and passed away without seeing them. On Thursday night they began to suffer severely from hunger and thirst, and the wreck began to show further signs of breaking up.

Mrs. Jones's face and hands were so blistered by the sun that patches of skin, and even her finger-nails, came off. To assuage her thirst she chewed a piece of lead, and found that it sensibly relieved her. She also suffered from broken spars and pieces of wood with nails in them that were driven by the force of the waves against her body, and wounded and pierced her flesh.

On Friday morning the Rev. William Oke determined to try and swim ashore, but he was so weakened by hunger and

benumbed with cold, that he had not strength to use his hands. The current carried him away, and he was drowned in a few moments.

All had now perished except Mr. and Mrs. Jones and the captain. Mr. Jones was gradually sinking from the injuries he had received, and the exposure and hardship he had endured. Wave after wave broke over him as his faithful wife held him on the wreck. He died with words of prayer and triumph on his lips; and when she could no longer hold him, the sea swept away his corpse from the wreck, and he floated at her feet.

The captain died about the same time, and his body was also swept away.

She was now the sole survivor on the wreck, and it was a miracle she had not been devoured by the sharks and devil-fishes that were attracted to the place by the floating corpses.

It was Friday afternoon, and she had never tasted food or drink since Monday at noon. She had been drenched with sea-water and scorched by a tropical sun every day, and exposed to the chills at night. She became exhausted and sleepy, and sank into a state of insensibility. The last thing she remembered on the wreck was the sight of her husband's dead body lying by her knee, and kept from floating away by a piece of the bowsprit.

Late in the afternoon of Friday two gentlemen found her alone on the wreck. They took her ashore in their boat, and found that she was scarcely alive. Her pulse had almost ceased to beat, and consciousness had fled. Her complexion was the colour of soot, and her features were so frightfully distorted that she was only recognised by a guard ring that she wore on her left hand.

Her friends nursed and tended her with the utmost solicitude and care. The best medical help that could be secured was given to her case; and, thanks to a good constitution and her youth, she began slowly to recover.

The body of her husband was rescued from the sharks and devil-fishes, and brought ashore for interment, with every mark of respect.

As soon as she was fit to travel her medical adviser ordered

her to return to England. It was a touching sight to see the young widow, not yet twenty-four years of age, bidding farewell to the kind friends who had nursed and cared for her in her illness. Even the poor Negroes crowded round the house to wish her God-speed, and give her some small token of their esteem and affection.

After a prosperous but stormy passage, she landed at Hastings, and after a brief rest there she went to her father's house, where she was received as one alive from the dead. Throughout her fearful sufferings she never regretted the choice she had made, or faltered in her loyalty to the Saviour she loved and served. When she was hanging between life and death, after her rescue from the wreck, and the friends were writing to her father in England, she said : "If you write to my father, say that I have never regretted engaging in the mission work."

For six years and four months she lived in widowhood, chiefly at Liverpool. Her health was gradually restored, and she was able to discharge the duties of a class-leader, and devote her energies to Christian work.

On the 13th of July, 1832, she was united in marriage to Thomas Crouch Hincksman, Esq., of Preston, and was thus introduced to Fylde Methodism, through her second marriage, when she was about thirty years of age.

Mr. Hincksman had already proved his loyalty to the cause by faithful and efficient service, both at Chorley and Preston ; and his young wife, who had done and suffered so much for Methodism, was welcomed as a tried and trusted friend, and was treated with the respect and esteem due to her high character and distinguished services.

During their residence in Preston, they undertook an unpromising piece of home mission work that was signally blessed of God, and led to the establishment of the vast organisations at Croft Street Schools, and Marsh Lane Chapel. Mr. Hincksman's mill overlooked a low tract of land a few feet above the river, and known as "the marsh." This marsh being on the outskirts of the town, and almost beyond municipal oversight, was the haunt of the roughs who spent

the Sabbath in folly and sin. Dog-racing, pigeon-flying, gambling, wrestling, and even prize-fighting, were the Sunday amusements of those times, and Mr. Hincksmán resolved to deal with these evils himself. He hired a small room in Gildow Street, and commenced a Sunday-school. This room was soon filled with ignorant, neglected children, and the work prospered so greatly that a new school-room was built, towards which he contributed liberally.

For several years he toiled in this home mission field, winning for himself the esteem and affection of his neighbours, and bringing many lost neglected souls to a knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. His good wife encouraged and helped him in Christian enterprise and liberality in Preston till about the year 1847, when God called them by a mysterious Providence to a new scene of labour.

They had paid occasional visits to Lytham from Preston in search of health and recreation, and they had been concerned about the lifeless condition of Methodism in Lytham. Mr. Hincksmán had undertaken the oversight of the poor neglected Society, and had travelled from Preston every week to meet the class as leader.

But God, by a strange Providence, permitted Mrs. Hincksmán to be prostrated by a violent inflammation of the lungs, that utterly wasted her strength, and brought her to the gates of death. Her medical advisers ordered her to Lytham as soon as she was able to travel, and those who saw her arrive in the town, wrapped in rugs and blankets, predicted that she had gone there to die.

But her work was not done; God had a field of labour for her and her devoted husband in building a church at Lytham.

Somehow, the people of Lytham had not taken kindly to Methodism. They would attend the services, they would listen respectfully to what was said, they would forbear from persecution, but they would not join the Church. They could not be induced to cast in their lot, and toil, and suffer, and give, and deny themselves for Christ's sake.

This was the character that Moses Holden gave of the Lytham people in 1811, and they were no better in 1847.

A small chapel was built in Bath Street, mainly through the influence of Mr. Hincksman and his personal friends. It cost £600, and is now used as a coffee tavern. It had no sooner been opened in 1847, than the few friends who had helped him removed from the town, and left him to struggle with the entire responsibility of the cause, and a considerable debt on the chapel. He accepted the responsibility, and went boldly to work for the Master. So faithfully did he toil, and so freely did he give, that the Wesleyan Chapel in Lytham was known for many years as "Mr. Hincksman's Chapel."

It is impossible within the limits of this brief paper to tell what Mr. and Mrs. Hincksman did for Fylde Methodism. They found the Society at Lytham with a name to live, but really dead. It had no chapel, no school, or leader, or active organisation. They became leaders of the scattered Society. They helped to build the first chapel, with vestries and school-room. They conducted the school, and made it a success. They removed the debts by their liberality. They gathered in those who had hitherto held aloof. They gave a status, and a name, and a position of respectability to the cause. They stamped their own impress on the movement. And finally, they secured for Lytham a preacher's residence on the Beach, in one of the best parts of the town, and a handsome and commodious chapel and schools. They devoted the best part of their days to the work of God in Lytham, and whatever of good has been done, has been mainly through their instrumentality in guiding and controlling by their intelligence, and in supporting by their liberality.


It was a joy and a privilege to them to give, and labour, and serve in the cause of Christ. For twelve long years did Mrs. Hincksman pray for the prosperity of Zion. On Sunday, April 17, 1859, the Master called her to His presence chamber, for her work was done. She died in great peace.

Her devoted husband lingered for nearly a quarter of a century longer. He passed away in age and feebleness extreme, December 13, 1883, leaving behind him the heritage of a good name, and a living, active, prosperous Church, as his best memorial.



XIII.

FRANCIS PARNELL OF SOUTH SHORE.

MOST of the apostles of Fylde Methodism were born, and bred, and brought to Christ in the Fylde country; and we honour them for their life-long devotion to the cause. But there are a few devoted men and women who were brought by a strange and mysterious Providence from other places to do work here that nobody else could or would undertake.

The story of Francis Parnell's life and work is so romantic and extraordinary, that I should have hesitated to believe it if I had not heard it from his own lips.

He was born in Manchester in 1799, in poverty and obscurity. His childhood was spent amid the squalid misery of the slums of that city. He was ill fed and badly clothed, and endured all the hardships and privations of those terrible "war times."

At eight years of age he was sent to work in a cotton-mill to earn his own living. There were no Factory Acts or School Boards in those days, so he was reduced to a condition of absolute slavery. He was dragged out of bed in a morning at five o'clock, and sent through the streets of Manchester in all weathers to be at work in the factory by six o'clock. He toiled all day till seven, or eight, or even nine o'clock at night, for a miserable pittance that would only clothe him in rags and feed him with the food of a dog. He

counted himself fortunate if he could obtain three meals a day of oatmeal porridge, with a slice of bread and butter on Sundays. So that for some years he knew as little of life's sunshine and comfort as a West Indian Negro or a galley slave.

When he was fifteen years of age he caught the war-fever. He was lamentably ignorant, for he had never had a day's schooling in his life, and did not know a letter of the alphabet; but he had heard the names of Napoleon, and Wellington, and Nelson, and had listened with breathless attention to stories of the great battles that had been fought, and he had taken part in the rejoicings for the great victories that had been won.

It was the fashion then for youths of fifteen to enlist, and as it promised him a respite from the slavery of the factory, and a chance of seeing the world, he made up his mind to accept the king's shilling. One day he walked to Liverpool, and volunteered as a marine for the royal navy.

He was trained and drilled on board the guardship for a few months, and when his period of training expired he was drafted to Plymouth and placed on board the guardship "St. George." He was daily expecting to be shipped by the first man-of-war that happened to run short of marines, when news came that Wellington and Blucher had utterly routed the French at Waterloo, and Napoleon was a prisoner.

This news was a great disappointment to the youngster, for he had been waiting for an opportunity of "smelling powder" and distinguishing himself in battle. But now the wars were over, the "St. George" was paid off, and the young marines were discharged.

Francis Parnell left the navy with all his worldly goods tied up in a napkin, and three shillings in his pocket. He was put ashore at one of the docks in Plymouth; and as it was a mile from the town, he spent one shilling in the luxury of a cab. He had now two shillings left; and as the bells were ringing, and the banners were waving, and the people going wild with joy for the prospects of peace, he spent

another shilling in grog to contribute his share to the universal chorus of rejoicing.

He had now one shilling left to cover his expenses for a journey of three hundred and sixteen miles to Manchester. A number of his comrades from the "St. George" were in similar circumstances, and as they hailed from Bristol, or some of the Midland towns on his road, they set out together on tramp, a party of sixteen. They were kindly treated on the way, for, though the people were utterly sick and weary of war, they received the soldiers and sailors with kindness and hospitality.

At night they would find their way to some lonely farmhouse and beg a night's lodgings in the barn on a bed of hay or straw. Next morning a few quarts of milk, and a few loaves, or some oatmeal porridge, would provide the principal meal of the day. And sailor-like they shared together all that came in their way. When one man's money was exhausted, he fared just as well as if he were still able to contribute his share towards the expenses.

Francis Parnell had not tramped far before he began to fear that his shoes would be worn out before he reached Manchester; so he took them off, with his stockings, and slung them over his shoulder. He finished his journey barefoot, and saved his shoes to give him a respectable appearance in his native city.

When the little company had dwindled away to half a dozen, and their funds were exhausted, they had to suffer great privations. Somebody told them of a cottage where a widow would receive them kindly. She had lost a son at sea, and she never refused food or shelter to distressed seamen; so they called upon her and stated their case.

Poor creature! she was penniless, and in need of help, but the memory of her own missing boy prompted her to do what she could. She gave one of the lads a fork, and told him to dig some potatoes in her garden. She gave a tinder box and flint to another, and told him to light a fire of turf in the road. She sent another for a bucket of water to wash the

potatoes, and when they were roasted she provided some salt, which at that day cost sixpence a pound.

Francis Parnell has often told, with quivering lip and tear-dimmed eye, how he and his famished comrades enjoyed that meal, and how they devoured every potato, "jackets and all." He used to wonder whether God ever recompensed that poor widow for her hospitality; and in later years, when he rose to a position of wealth, he tried to find her out and place her above penury and want. But he failed to find her.

The journey from Plymouth to Manchester was accomplished in six days, at an average speed of nearly fifty-three miles a day. He reported himself that night to a mill manager, and found employment immediately. Next morning at six o'clock he was at work, and again earning his own living.

He was now nearly seventeen years of age, a strong, active, industrious youth; and his employer, taking a kindly interest in his welfare, gave him a New Testament. He took the Testament home, and admired its neat type and attractive binding; but he knew not a letter of its contents.

He made up his mind he would learn to read, and he set about it in his own way. A few friends and neighbours had died recently, and their names were engraved on their memorial stones in the churchyard. He contrived to familiarise himself with the forms of the letters of his friend's names, and thus learned a few letters of the alphabet.

His next step was to take his Testament with him to the churchyard in the summer mornings and evenings, and compare the forms of the letters on the gravestones with the letters in the book, till he was able to name all the large and small letters, and combine them into small words. It was a laborious and tedious method of learning to read, but his strong will and indomitable perseverance enabled him to surmount his difficulties.

Having learned to read by his own unaided efforts, he found that he had the keys of knowledge in his own hands, and he commenced in earnest to instruct himself, and to fit himself for a better position in life.

When he was about twenty years of age, he was walking listlessly through the streets of Manchester one Sunday evening, and was arrested by the sound of music. He saw hundreds of people pressing into a large building as if they were intent on some great business. His curiosity was excited, and he joined the stream, and soon found himself borne by the crowd to the farther end of the building. It proved to be a Methodist Chapel, and the preacher was Dr. Bunting.

He was astonished at the vast crowd of worshippers, and charmed and pleased with the hearty congregational singing. The prayer was full of pathos and power, and the well-timed responses of devout men and women made a deep impression upon his mind. So that by the time the venerable preacher reached his text, he was the subject of thoughts and feelings that stirred his soul to its depths.

The sermon was on the new birth; and as the preacher showed the necessity of a thorough change of heart, and the means by which that change had to be secured, he resolved to seek and find this great blessing.

He at once joined the Methodist Society, and received his note of admission on trial from the Rev. Thomas Jackson, who travelled in the Oldham Street Circuit, in 1820. The preacher put his hand upon his head when he gave him his ticket at the March visitation of the class, and said solemnly in the presence of the whole class: "May God bless you and make you a blessing. Amen."

The solemnity and unction of that class-meeting service he remembered to his dying day.

He soon identified himself heart and soul with the people of his choice. He found employment in the Sunday-school, and diligently cultivated his talents, and made the most of his opportunities. From that time his career was one of great prosperity.

At a comparatively early age he became manager of one of the largest weaving concerns in Manchester, and by his intimate knowledge of the business, and his tact and push, he gained for himself a good name and great esteem.

In 1832 he became partner with Mr. Thompson in the cotton business. They had not been long in business together when they were tempted to speculate in cotton. Believing that the raw material had an upward tendency, and must soon become very dear, they made a bargain with a well-known firm to take a million pounds' weight at a given price. They had no sooner signed the contract than cotton began to decline, and in a very short time it had fallen three-pence per pound. Mr. Thompson was terribly disappointed at the prospect of losing a million threepences, and went about the mill for some days despondent and gloomy. But Mr. Parnell went to the gentleman who had contracted with them, and simply asked for an extension of time in the delivery of the cotton, which was readily granted. They took every pound of the cotton they had promised, and though they lost thousands of pounds by the bargain, they gained a reputation in the commercial world for integrity and uprightness that brought them thousands more.

While he was in business, he found time for public service to his native city. For eleven years he was a member of the Board of Guardians for the poor, and for six years he was a member of the City Council. While thus engaged in public life, he never neglected the claims of the Church. He built Ebenezer Wesleyan School-Room at Red Bank, a building large enough to accommodate six hundred children, and gave it to the Connexion.

In 1864 he removed to Blackpool, in consequence of his wife's ill health, and settled at South Shore. At that time South Shore was not connected with Blackpool, but formed a separate hamlet or village. But it has grown so rapidly, and risen so much in public favour, that it is now part of the borough of Blackpool, and connected with it by streets and houses.

It was then governed by a local board, and he was soon elected one of the commissioners, and continued in office for six years. He is said to have been the first to propose the incorporation of the town.

When it was incorporated, he was elected one of the first aldermen, and shortly afterwards he was unanimously chosen mayor of the borough. But he regarded municipal honours and public services as very secondary matters. He valued more highly than these things the privilege of helping the cause of Christ and supporting the Church of his choice.

When he came to South Shore, in 1864, he found a little Society of Methodists worshipping in a hired room, and he immediately cast in his lot among them.

The history of South Shore Methodism really dates from about 1859, when a few devoted Sunday-school teachers and Christian workers from Adelaide Street Chapel, Blackpool, undertook a Mission there. The services were held at first in a large room in the building that is now used as the Hydropathic Establishment. The first leader was the late Mr. H. T. Wilson, bookseller, of Talbot Square; and a Sunday-school was formed under his management. It was supported by the Blackpool Sunday-school funds, and worked as a branch of the parent school. Preaching services were also held there regularly.

Many years previously to this effort there had been Methodists resident in South Shore who walked regularly to Blackpool for worship and Christian fellowship. The first members of the Society were Alexander Butcher and Mary, his wife, with their daughter Betsy. They met in Mr. Bird's class many years ago in Blackpool, and were reckoned as part of the Blackpool Society.

Mr. Wilson's Mission at South Shore prospered so greatly that it became necessary to find the Church another home. The old Temperance Hall—a building situated between Bolton Street and South Parade—had fallen upon evil times, and had been transformed into a coach house. This place was cleaned out, and fitted with seats, and adapted to the requirements of the little Church for a time. Still nobody believed that it could be a permanent home.

It was when the Church was worshipping in the coach-house that Mr. Parnell appeared upon the scene.

He was quick to recognise and acknowledge the good work that had been done there before he came. Too much praise cannot be given to those self-denying and devoted men and women who laid the foundations and built so much of the walls of Zion. There are men and women living now who rendered invaluable services there, but they would scarcely thank me to record their names on this page. They have a more permanent record.

Mr. Parnell's quick eye saw that the paramount urgent need of the South Shore Society was a new chapel.

The people in the neighbourhood had some pretensions to respectability and refinement. The place was rapidly growing in area and population, and he believed that a Church that could boast no better home than a coach-house or a stable would never be able to influence the neighbourhood for good.

But there was a still more urgent need in the inconveniences of the old coach-house. At that time there was no efficient sea fence, and when there came a high tide, backed by a south-west wind, the sea flooded the preaching-room, and filled the adjoining streets. If these storms occurred on Sundays, they interfered with worship, and I find occasional entries in Mr. Parnell's diary to this effect: "We had no school this afternoon, nor service this evening, the room being flooded by the sea."

But though the case was so urgent, the little Church at South Shore could not undertake the work. It seemed to be waiting for Providence to find a man with money enough and liberality enough to build a chapel.

After much care and prayer and anxious deliberation, he bought a piece of land in Rawcliffe Street, and built a chapel, which was opened in 1869. It is a neat and commodious structure, and cost about £1400. For this act of generosity he received the thanks of Conference.

No sooner had he built the chapel than there was a demand for a new school. The children had been saving their pennies, and small sums of money had been accumulating. These were supplemented by voluntary contributions, and by liberal

gifts from Mr. Parnell. So that in 1870 a convenient school-room was erected adjoining the chapel mainly through his liberality.

Having seen the Church at South Shore safely housed and provided with a permanent home, his next ambition was to see a resident minister. To effect this he again gave generously, and for a term of years, to maintain the preacher.

He was never a rich man as some men count riches, but he gave freely and with commendable discrimination. He held his property, as he held his time and talents, in trust for the good of his fellow-men and the glory of God. It is calculated that in eighteen years, from 1852 to 1870, he gave away £11,000, and in some of those years he must have given away more than half of his income. So far as we can judge, all this was done from the purest motives, and he was impelled to it by a high sense of duty.

Many of his acts of purest generosity will never be known, for he kept no record of them. In his visitation of the sick he would go to the bedside of a sailor, or a navvy, as willingly as to his equals in social position, carrying spiritual comfort to the sick, and substantial help to the orphan and the widow.

But his services to the cause were not all pecuniary and mercenary. He rendered such intellectual and spiritual service as money cannot buy.

For nineteen years he was superintendent of South Shore Sunday-school, and fourteen years of that time he conducted the school personally, morning and afternoon, yet he was not known to be late more than three times. When nearly eighty years of age, he would fight his way through wind and rain to the Sunday morning school, and spend the day in Christian work.

He was an able and efficient class-leader, and held the office of Circuit steward.

It was my privilege to know him personally during the last few years of his life.

When I was first introduced to him, I was struck with

his venerable appearance. He was rather below medium height, slightly corpulent, with a very florid complexion, and snow-white hair. He was well-dressed, and scrupulously clean, and his hair and beard and moustache carefully trimmed and adjusted. He had the bearing and appearance and manners of an old Methodist gentleman of the last generation. Had he been a little taller, and not quite so corpulent, he would have reached my ideal of Roger Crane in personal appearance and dress.

I found him wonderfully acute and lively for a man of nearly fourscore. His quick eye saw everything, and his ready wit comprehended and expressed all he saw and heard. He loved a good story, and could crack a joke with a friend, and laugh, and enjoy the good things of life, better than many a younger man. He had a sunny and bright old age.

And yet he had his failings and shortcomings. He had faults of temper, and of manner, and of conduct, of which he was painfully conscious, and against which he strove continually.

I found him sometimes headstrong, and self-willed, and easily irritated; but when he found himself transgressing after this fashion, he would repent and make all the restitution in his power. He had all the virtues, and many of the vices, of the self-made man. The very qualities that enabled him to fight life's battles so successfully unfitted him for governing and influencing minds and wills as strong as his own. Hence, he sometimes came into collision with other men, and sometimes offended and estranged them.

On social, municipal, political, and religious questions he formed very decided opinions of his own, and clung to them most tenaciously. In times of turmoil and strife, when men's passions were roused, and when burning questions were being discussed, he would fling himself into the fray with a light heart, and deal such ponderous, well-directed blows about him, as would astonish and almost overwhelm his opponents. And when the battle had been lost and won, his opponents would smart for many a day, and perhaps judge him harshly and severely for his vehemence.

They did not know that his whole life had been one long, persistent fight with fate and fortune. He might have lived and died in ignorance, and poverty, and obscurity, if he would. But he fought and vanquished "the fickle goddess," and made her do his bidding. And having conquered in life's battle in his earlier years, he encountered the difficulties of his later life with dauntless courage, and heroic effort, and unflinching determination.

But with all his infirmities and failings, his was a grand life, and it came to a fitting close. On Tuesday, July 1st, 1884, he entertained a friend at tea, and was as merry and cheerful as a little child till about eight o'clock. He then complained of feeling tired, and retired early to rest. He had a fainting fit, and medical aid was summoned. He was put to bed, and when consciousness returned, he composed himself for death like a child going to sleep. In less than two hours

"He sweetly, calmly, passed away
From earth's dim twilight, to eternal day."

He was interred at Blackpool Cemetery on Friday, July 4th, having lived nearly eighty-five years. The lessons of such a life suggest the poet's lines—

"We would the great world grew like thee,
Who grewest—not alone in power
And knowledge—but, by year and hour,
In reverence and in charity."





XIV.

SHEAVES FROM THE HARVEST FIELD.



THE year 1784 witnessed the first feeble efforts to mission the Fylde country. The Rev. Charles Atmore was junior preacher in the Colne Circuit.

"The field of his labours was large; extending seven miles beyond Preston westward, twenty miles northward from Colne, within one mile and a half of Rochdale to the south, and three and a half miles from Halifax to the east, including a people now 'spread into bands.' The preachers seldom met, except on quarter-day. On horseback daily, journeying from place to place, they proclaimed 'glad tidings of great joy.' This year, such a glorious work of grace began in the Circuit as had never been known before. So great were the numbers that everywhere flocked to hear the Gospel, that the chapels could not contain them, and the services were often held out of doors."

It was during these times of gracious revival that Charles Atmore came into close personal contact with Michael Emmett, Roger Crane, and William Bramwell at Preston. These three were "meeting in band," and stimulating and encouraging each other to deeds of daring and self-devotion in the Master's service. Their hearts were full of love to Christ, and their enthusiasm was at a white heat, so that they were ready to go anywhere and do anything to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation.

Hence we find Michael Emmett taking his memorable journey to Garstang, and preaching on the market-day at the obelisk, and penetrating the hamlets of Upper Wyresdale, in the true spirit of the apostles. 2

At this time we hear of Roger Crane enduring persecution, and facing an angry mob at Poulton, and preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ in every village in the neighbourhood of Preston.

And it was at the same period that William Bramwell threw himself heart and soul into evangelistic work, toiling with amazing physical endurance for the salvation of his countrymen in the Fylde.

The work prospered so greatly in the Colne Circuit that Charles Atmore became superintendent of the Circuit in 1785, and some marvellous stories are told of the triumphs of the Gospel that year.

“At Colne, which had been proverbially dead for a number of years, the people came in such numbers that the congregation had to leave the chapel, and the services were held in the fields.”

“At Burnley, the rich people did what they could to hinder the work, and drive the Methodists from the place; but they preached in the most public parts of the town, and a large and commodious chapel was speedily built.”

“At Blackburn, the ‘old calender house’ became too small; a new chapel was built, and the Society considerably increased.”

“In Preston, Haslingden, Bacup, Todmorden, and Heptonstall, the arm of the Lord was made bare; so that the whole Circuit, with the exception of the north of Pendle Hill, seemed to flame with the glory of God. And it seemed as if the whole country would bow to the sceptre of redeeming mercy and grace.”

This testimony from a trustworthy historian goes to prove that the Fylde Mission enterprise was born during a gracious revival of religion, and was undertaken in the true spirit of apostolic enterprise. Emmett, Crane, and Bramwell believed

that God had called them to preach the Gospel to the stolid heathen of the Fylde country. It was a work of stupendous difficulty, and appalling magnitude, but that was no concern of theirs. It was not their business to estimate probabilities, or forecast results, or make themselves responsible for success. God had committed to them the good seed of the kingdom, and it was their business to break up the ground, and till the soil, and plant, and sow. They left the seed to fertilise by God's blessing, and trusted Him for the waving harvest.

This was the spirit in which these three young men went forth exactly a hundred years ago.

Let us pause to examine their work and estimate its results.

1. *Its growth was slow.*

It required more than a quarter of a century to bring the field into cultivation. As soon as ever the pioneers of the movement became efficient workmen they were called away to other fields of labour. Bramwell entered the ministry as soon as he began to see some conversions in the Fylde country, and he was employed in some of the largest Circuits in the kingdom. Michael Emmett was called away by Mr. Wesley, and sent as a travelling preacher, as soon as he had shown his fitness for evangelistic work. Only Roger Crane remained to prosecute the work, with such helpers as he could raise up and qualify in his own neighbourhood.

And this feature of the work has been manifest ever since. To this day the village Societies are continually sending their blood and treasure to enrich the town and city Churches. Let a young man get converted at Pilling, or Eccleston, or Garstang, and the place soon becomes too small for him. He cultivates his talents, and gains a commercial value, till somebody finds out what he is worth, and tempts him away to Preston, or Manchester, or London.

And this difficulty will always be in the way of the progress of village Methodism in the Fylde country. In a stationary or declining population the Church can do little more than hold its own, and make up the losses from death and removal.

If we trace the landmarks of history from 1784 to 1810, we shall find that, though the growth of the movement was slow, it was sure.

In 1784 there was not a chapel, or a school, or a minister's house, or a Circuit, or a minister in the Fylde country. The little band of Methodists at Preston worshipped in a hired room, and had occasional visits from the preachers at Colne.

In 1785 Ann Cutler was converted, and soon commenced her career as an evangelist among the mothers, and sisters, and wives of the Fylde farmers. Her influence for good was incalculable. She lighted candles that flickered and flamed in remote cottages and farm-houses for a generation. Martha Thompson went with her on some of her early missionary journeys. Being a good singer, and well educated, she could both exhort and sing, while Ann Cutler prayed, and pointed sinners to Christ. They travelled so far, and fared so badly, that Martha Thompson was soon ill in bed among strangers. Her father, hearing of her illness, fetched her home, and warned her never to go again. He said, "Nanny Cutler will soon kill thee. She is as strong as a horse, and thou hast no business to try to work with her."

In 1787 the Back Lane Chapel was built at Preston, and the Church thus came out of lodgings, and had a home of its own. In the same year Blackburn became the head of the Circuit, with two ministers.

In 1790 John Wesley paid his last visit to Lancashire, and was entertained by Mrs. Michael Emmett. Part of the manuscript of his journal has been lost, and thus his record of the visit has perished. We have abundant evidence of his visit from the testimony of those who saw him, and Moses Holden heard him preach.

In 1792 the Rev. William Smith was appointed minister at Lancaster for one year. There was no minister appointed in 1793; but in the following year the Rev. Abraham Moseley was sent, and the Lancaster Circuit may be said to have been formed at that time. This arrangement gave the Lancaster ministers an introduction to Wyresdale and Garstang, and

for some years the northern portion of the Fylde country was worked from Lancaster.

In 1799 Preston was deemed strong enough to be made the head of a Circuit, and the Rev. John Leach and John Dutton were appointed ministers.

In 1800 the new Circuit reported a membership of 373, and seemed likely to make satisfactory progress ; but the Church was torn to pieces with dissension and strife in the following year, and those who had successfully resisted the violence of persecution had well-nigh been destroyed by treachery.

In 1804 the membership had fallen as low as 255, and the Circuit had but one preacher. The party who caused a secession took possession of the keys of the chapel, and tried hard to turn the Society into the streets, and leave them without a home. But they failed in this enterprise, and after a period of strife and trouble the little Church had rest.

In 1805 two ministers were again appointed. The young man was the Rev. John Wright, who afterwards became the Fylde missionary. From this time the work of God made slow but steady progress.

In 1810 the Rev. Thomas Jackson was appointed to the Circuit, and during his "thoughtful ministry" the Society greatly increased. He had not been long in the Circuit before he gave his attention to the Fylde country, and sent Moses Holden on his famous expedition to organise the various Societies into classes, and appoint leaders, and make arrangements for regular services.

In 1811 the Rev. John Wright undertook the Fylde Mission, and Garstang became the head of the Circuit, and independent of Preston.

Thus twenty-seven years of patient toil and unwearying self-denial were given to the rough pioneer work of breaking up the soil and bringing the field into cultivation. God Almighty sorely tried the faith and patience of those early toilers in the field ; but they endured as seeing Him Who is invisible. They clung to the plough, and the spade, and the

implements of spiritual husbandry ; and through all those long weary years of toil—

“ They laboured on at God’s command,
And offered all their works to Him.”

2. *These men reproduced themselves.*

“ Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” These men and women who were the pioneers of the movement were made of sterling stuff. They were whole-hearted, self-denying, holy men and women. They had a high standard of excellence. Their characters were pure and good. Their lives were holy, and active, and useful. They were spiritual giants—full of faith and of the Holy Ghost.

And their spiritual children were like them. Let not the reader imagine that I have exhausted the list of worthy men and women in the preceding chapters of this book. I have only taken a few samples from the bulk. There are plenty more as true, and noble, and worthy as any that have appeared hitherto. My difficulty has not been to find characters, and lives of service, worthy of recording. My difficulty has been to pick and choose from the multitude a thoroughly representative group, without ignoring any who deserved a place on these pages.

Martha Thompson, Mary Barrett, Ann Cutler, and Mrs. Hincksman deserve all the honour that we can bestow upon their memories ; but if they could speak to us from the temple above, they would remind us of Mrs. Disley, and Mrs. Tomlinson, and Mrs. Cumpsty, and Mrs. Threlfall of Fleetwood, and a host of self-denying, holy women, who were counterparts of themselves.

This is just as true of the men as of the women. They were all genuine fruits of the Spirit, and with all their excellences they are but samples of hundreds more that might be found if we would diligently seek them.

Take a few samples of converts from the Fylde, who entered the ministry and the mission-field, and consecrated their lives to the salvation of their fellow-men.

William Illingworth was born at Blackburn in 1806. He was the son of Methodist parents, who removed from Blackburn to the neighbourhood of Garstang when he was but a youth. He was converted in early life, and apprenticed as an engraver at Catterall Print-works. Being a youth of great piety and moderate education, he was pressed into the service of the Church, and became a local preacher at the age of sixteen. From 1822 to 1829 he laboured as a local preacher in the Fylde country. He endured persecution and suffered great hardships in this work. He has often walked thirty or forty miles on a Sunday, preached three times, and fed on oatmeal and water, or bread and milk. The people were so poor that they could not afford to entertain him at some places, and he has carried a piece of bread and cheese in his pocket, and accepted only a cup of cold water from the people to whom he ministered. In 1829 he became a travelling preacher, and for more than thirty years he travelled in some of the best Circuits in the Connexion. His labours were eminently acceptable and useful, and his ministry was greatly blessed to the awakening and conversion of many souls. In 1864 he was disabled by a railway accident, and became a supernumerary at Luzley Brook, Oldham, where he died in 1873, aged 67.

Daniel Barr was a youth who was converted at Garstang, and became an intimate friend of William Illingworth and Richard Brash. These three lads met in band, and lived and laboured many years together in the Fylde. Daniel Barr was of very humble parentage, and had received but a scanty education. But he was soundly converted, and immediately cast in his lot with the Methodists. He soon distinguished himself by his fervent piety and ceaseless activity. He read his Bible, and cultivated his talents, and made the most of his opportunities. Having fitted himself by reading and study and prayer for a sphere of usefulness, he was pressed into the service as a local preacher. For five or six years he laboured with great zeal and devotedness, and the memory of his preaching lingers among the old

people to this day. I have heard them tell of his self-denial, and earnestness, and success. Souls were converted under his ministry, and even worldly men learned to honour and esteem him. He had the true missionary spirit in him, and in 1830 he volunteered for foreign service. He was sent to Jamaica in 1831, and laboured there with great acceptance and success. He was a man of deep and habitual piety; an affectionate, upright, consistent man, and a zealous and faithful preacher. He was sent to the West Indies during the old days of slavery, and he had the privilege of witnessing the emancipation of the Negroes. He was present at the famous watch-night service, when his congregation knelt as bondmen and slaves, and when the clock struck twelve, they rose as freemen, and joined in the triumphant song—

“ Blow ye the trumpet, blow,
 The gladly solemn sound,
 Let all the nations know,
 To earth’s remotest bound;
 The year of jubilee is come:
 Return, ye ransomed sinners, home.”

By a strange and mysterious Providence his young life was cut short just as his powers were fully developed, and his work was bearing fruit. He was seized with some tropical illness—either yellow fever or dysentery—and carried away after only a few days’ illness. He died at Morant Bay, October 17, 1835, aged 30.

John Stirzaker was the son of a labourer at Poulton. He was born in 1813, and when a youth of fifteen he was converted during the great revival. He entered the ministry in 1838, and travelled in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Bishop Auckland, Walsall, and other large Circuits for sixteen years. His talents were of a high order. His sermons were lucid, instructive, and practical. He was of a friendly, obliging disposition. He laboured with great acceptance till the year 1854, when he was laid aside by illness, which proved to be fatal. He died at the age of forty, having gained for himself the esteem of

his brethren, and the approval of the Churches where he had laboured.

Time would fail me to tell of Robert Spence Hardy, James Hargreaves, John W. Crankshaw, James Thornton, Charles Newton, Thomas Lofthouse, and Henry Threlfall, who were all in the true apostolic succession. They left all and followed Christ. They forsook parents, and home, and friends, and consecrated their lives to the Master's service. And having served God, and their generation according to His will, they were called home to heaven.

But what about those who are still toiling in the harvest-field? John Kilner, John Brash, Hugh Jones (A), Daniel Pearson, James Peet, T. T. Lambert, Peter Thompson, Richard Rossall, Joseph Berry, Edward Jackson, Thomas Jackson, and others whose names are beyond my reach, belong to this honoured band.

The harvest of worthy laymen has also been remarkably rich and encouraging. Timothy France, Esq., of Preston, was a model of transparent, open-hearted humanity; distinguished by his great uprightness, benevolence, and deep, unwavering piety. He took an active part in the work of the British and Foreign Bible Society, and was one of its most liberal supporters. He was a member of Society forty years, and filled most of the important offices of the Church, with honour to himself, and great benefit to the Society. He died March 3, 1825, aged 64.

Samuel Parker of Preston was the friend of Bramwell, Emmett, and Crane. His house was the home of the preachers. He once entertained Mr. Wesley, and by his quiet acts of benevolence and hospitality rendered valuable help to the cause.

John Sellars was one of the founders of the Samaritan Society in Preston, a class-leader for thirty-six years, and one of the superintendents of Lune Street Sunday-school.

Edward Leece, senior, was an able and acceptable local preacher at Preston. His sermons were full of original matter, and were earnestly and powerfully delivered. He

was also a successful class-leader, and rendered most efficient service to the Church throughout a long life.

And in later times the succession of good and devoted men and women has been maintained. Some of them are alive to this day, and we shall never know their worth till they are called home to heaven. The only remarkable thing about them is their goodness. They are—

“Content to fill a little space,
If God be glorified.”

3. *God by His Providence has sent many more labourers into the field.*

For many years the field was cultivated entirely by the Wesleyan Methodists.

The Primitive Methodists began a work in Preston that grew and developed into two Circuits, with three ministers, and nearly seven hundred members. About the year 1847 a number of fishermen migrated from Banks, near Southport, to Fleetwood, and commenced a movement that resulted in the establishment of the Fleetwood and Blackpool Circuits, with two ministers, and nearly two hundred members. Garstang, and the northern portions of the Fylde, are worked from Lancaster, so that the Primitive Methodists are bringing to bear on this work all the energies of five Circuits, with six ministers, and about a thousand members, besides an efficient staff of leaders, local preachers, and Sunday-school teachers.

The United Methodist Free Church has had a highly efficient organisation in Preston for many years. Recently a Church has been established at Blackpool, with one minister, and about one hundred members. The chapel and school cost £4500, and there is a flourishing Sunday-school with nearly three hundred scholars and teachers.

The Wesleyan Methodist Church has grown into five Circuits, with ten travelling preachers, and nearly three thousand members. It has a perfect network of Sunday and day-school organisations with Bands of Hope and religious

appliances of every kind for carrying on the work our fathers so nobly commenced.

So that the Lord of the harvest has sent forth many labourers into the harvest-field, and so long as we are faithful He will own and bless our efforts. It is exactly a hundred years since the early apostles of Fylde Methodism began their noble, self-denying work. The Church of to-day heeds not their centenary, and makes no mention of their honoured names. But I regard it as a privilege and a duty to lay the chapters of this book as so many memorial wreaths upon their graves. And I count it an honour to have a name and a place among the successors of the apostles. The Lord of the harvest still owns and blesses His faithful labourers, and in the great reckoning day we shall receive our wages.

His message to us is the same as He gave to His disciples in the olden times—

“Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest ?

“Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields ; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal : that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth.

“I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour : other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours.”

THE END.

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